The Occupation in Television: An Analysis of how Fauda's Portrayal of Palestinians impacts the perception of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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The Occupation in Television

An Analysis of how *Fauda*'s Portrayal of Palestinians impacts the perception of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

by

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Disclaimer

This thesis was written before the outbreak of violence in Israel and Gaza strip in May 2021. These events are not considered in this piece of work. However, their effect on future cultural production in Israel is an interesting topic and should be explored in another setting.

Note on Transliteration

To prevent confusion the Arabic and Hebrew Names of Characters in the *Fauda* were taken over as spelled in the show, without regard for a systematic or consistent transliteration. Author's, producer's, creator's, and actor's names were spelled as on their official publications, websites, or as spelled in the show's credits.

Introduction

The Television show *Fauda*, meaning "chaos" in Arabic, tells the story of an Israeli undercover unit operating in the occupied Palestinian territories. The show was created by Avi Issacharoff and Lior Raz in 2015. The two friends were inspired by their former professions.[1] Raz, a former member of an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) undercover unit, and Issacharoff, a well-known journalist, reporting from the Occupied Palestinian Territories,[2] set out to tell the Arab-Israeli conflict from an "insider's" perspective. Their goal was to show the fight between Israelis and Palestinians in a new light: to cover both sides of the struggle and dive deep into the emotional toll it takes on all parties involved, depicting mental health issues and signs of PTSD.

Fauda is influenced by Israeli news coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict and portrays realistic and understated styling.[3] The evening news, as Yael Munk explained, has a cult status in Israel and is an inherent part of the daily routine of most Israelis.[4] Issacharoff and Raz tried to use stylistic elements of the evening news reports to connect with their audience. The creators of the show made the conscious decision to shoot it in Arab villages in Israel, far from major Israeli cities, and more central villages that are often used in television production and thus well known by the Israeli audience.[5] The show reached immense popularity in Israel and was bought and distributed by Netflix in 2016. Not only did *Fauda* gain popularity for its storyline and styling, but it generated praise for its "humane" and "three-dimensional" portrayal of Palestinians as well as its critique of the Israeli Defence Forces. Damian Whitworth wrote for the *The Times* that *Fauda*'s plot "might read like the outline for a Palestinian propaganda film" and notes Arab-Israeli unity in their love for the show.[6] Three years later, Hugo Rifkind

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[1] Oded Nir, "Fauda and Crisis," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 18:1, (2019): 125ff.

[2] The Occupied Palestinian Territories encompass the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

[3] Nir, „Fauda," 125ff.

[4] Yael Munk, „Fauda: the Israeli occupation on a Prime Time Television Drama; or, the melodrama of the enemy," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. 17:4, (2019): 488.

[5] Noa Lavie and Amal Jamal. „Constructing ethnonational differentiation o nthe set of the TV series, Fauda," *Ethnicities*, Vol. 19(6),)2019): 1045ff.

[6] Damian Whitworth, "Fauda: the show that makes Israelis like Hamas," *The Times*, 11. November 2015. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fauda-the-show-that-makes-israelis-like-hamas-5qjltkhlzf8

published an article in the *New York Times*[7] in which he expressed surprise that Israelis seem to love *Fauda* even though Palestinians in the show are "rarely absolute villains."[8]

On the other side of the spectrum, *Fauda* was critiqued for its orientalist and one-sided portrayal of Palestinians[9] as well as its glorification of human rights violations.[10] These points of critique are often dismissed as unjustified nonsense by the show's producers, actors, and fans.[11] While producers and actors deny the vilification of Palestinians, some fans recognize it but understand *Fauda* to be an action show free from political influence or ramifications. Others believe *Fauda* portrays the Arab-Israeli conflict truthfully and realistically.[12] Apart from the portrayal of Palestinians and the IDF in *Fauda*, I will consider the show's ability to produce a balanced image of the conflict.

Regarding the impact of cultural production John Fiske and John Hartley argued that the previous social function of reaching the masses has gone from novels to television.[13] This in itself is not a new idea. Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson predicted that television would eventually become the most relevant and influential field of production.[14] By now many scholars of media studies agree that the seemingly simple format of television shows takes a leading role in distributing values and narratives. However, as the world of television series keeps changing, we can assume that this function was passed on to online streaming services, like Netflix.

But not only has the medium of distribution of values and narratives changed over time, the audience it has reached has also changed with it and is more diverse and international than ever before. While the possibility of almost worldwide distribution of film and series has many appeals and benefits, producers and creators face a new challenge in taking the different

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[7] In general, a simplistic understanding of the Israel-Palestine conflict can be noted in US American newspapers and articles as well as reviews by the US American audience. Judging by my analysis the US American understanding of the conflict is heavily influenced by Israel – the democracy – being threatened by terrorism – Palestine.

[8] Hugo Rifkind, "Fauda: the drama that gets to the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict," *The Times*, 26. May 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fauda-the-drama-that-gets-to-the-heart-of-the-israel-palestine-conflict-0hd9pd07s.

[9] Sayed Kashua, "'Fauda' Creators Think Arabs Are Stupid," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 12. January 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-fauda-creators-think-arabs-are-stupid-1.5730664.

[10] Kashua, "'Fauda'."

[11] Tel Aviv Review, "How Did a Palestinian Terrorist Become Israel's National Heart Throb?," 21. May 2018, audio: https://open.spotify.com/episode/13ZG8wNkBZtbZSvASifSn2?si=e68ef504af1143aa.

[12] See chapter 3.2 and 3.3.

[13] John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2003): 5.

[14] Yoram Peri, *Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel*, (Standard, CA: Standford University Press 2004): 5. Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (Cambridge: Polity Press 1993).

political, social, and historical contexts of their newer, global audience into consideration when distributing their products internationally. For shows like *Fauda* that make an effort to keep their styling as realistic as possible, making the differentiation between the reflection of reality in a show and the reflection of social values is difficult, even for a regional audience.[15] An international audience, I argue, will have an even greater difficulty making this differentiation. These shows therefore play a big role in the distribution of regional norms, ideas, and values to an international audience.

In her study on Indian television drama, Purnima Mankekar shows how television can be used to distribute these social values. By creating a fabric appealing to the audiences emotions, the interwoven social, moral, and nationalistic values are taken on more easily.[16] Lila Abu-Lughod shares a similar standpoint, emphasising the distribution of social norms and values through media.[17] Furthermore, she calls for the study of the social, cultural, and political dynamics in which communities watch the series.[18] To determine the question of *Fauda*'s influence on its audience and their perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I am going to look into the show's content, context, and its audience's perception.

Historical Background

Although Raz and Issacharoff pitched the idea of *Fauda* to networks from 2011 on, it was only picked up and produced in 2014 during and in the aftermath of the 2014 Gaza invasions. This new wave of violence in Israel and Gaza, and the simultaneous protests in the West Bank could have played a role in the heightened demand for a show engaging with the conflict. Throughout the Arab spring the Palestinian territories had undergone a transition. Where protests before the Arab spring were directed toward Israel – an alien power – the Arab spring caused a redirection of these protests against the Palestinian leadership.[19] The protestor's main demands were the reconciliation of Fatah and Hamas as well as the lowering of food and fuel prices.[20] Clashes with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) flared up again in 2012 when the IDF initiated operation

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[15] Peri, *Telepopulism*, 10.

[16] Purnima Makekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation*, (Durhamn, London: Duke University Press 1999).

[17] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press 2005).

[18] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 30.

[19] James Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict: One hundred Years of War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014): 262.

[20] Gelvin, *Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 262.

Pillar of Cloud and again in 2014 with the initiation of operation Protective Edge.[21] Every new flare up of violence heightened the tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. The timing of the show's release, right after the 2014 attacks had died down, could therefore account for part of the backlash against the show's "sympathetic" portrayal of Palestinians and might – partly – explain the praise it got for its portrayal of both sides of the conflict. In an environment of loss, pain, and hardship, the production of a show like *Fauda* was a controversial step. The Israeli left, as well as many members of the foreign audience, understood the release of new Israeli series glorifying the IDF as a provocation and disregard of Palestinian suffering. The Israeli right and supporters of Israel's policy towards the Palestinian territories on the other hand deemed *Fauda* to justify terrorism. The controversy surrounding *Fauda*'s creation and the timing of the release of the first season might also explain why the show's writers, producers, and creators stayed far away from the topic of Gaza for the first two seasons of the show in which Gaza is barely mentioned.

Representation of Palestinians

The portrayal of Palestinians in *Fauda* is consistent with many prior shows and movies, displaying incredible insensitivity in their misrepresentation of marginalized groups within a society.[22] Although a steady increase in the portrayal of Palestinians, and Arabs in general, on screen can be noted since the 1950s,[23] the quality of representation is still questionable. *Fauda* is said to be a pioneer in this field by not only giving Palestinians more screen time and well-rounded backstories, but also because it offers a seemingly similar portrayal of Palestinians and Israelis. Yael Munk goes so far as to describe the portrayal of the two sides as "symmetrical, mathematically-balanced".[24] He sees *Fauda* as a show that uses political issues as a background for personal stories and makes Israelis uncomfortable as it confronts them with the images of IDF members whose portrayal is less than ideal and moral.[25] Nevertheless, I argue that even though *Fauda* contains the Palestinian character's personal backstories and attributes them more screen time, its image of Palestinians is still orientalist and stereotypical, resulting in the reproduction of an outdated and prejudiced notion of Palestinians and Arabs. Although the show addresses incorrect and unlawful behaviour of IDF members, it still paints them to be the heroes of the show. Whilst *Fauda* might "only" be an action show, its real-life ramifications should

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[21] Noura Erakat, Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press): 197.

[22] Jack Shaheen, *The TV Arab*, (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press 1984).

[23] Itay Harlap. *Television Drama in Israel: Identities in Post-TV Culture*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

[24] Munk, "Fauda," 489.

[25] Munk, "Fauda," 491.

not be underestimated. In fact, *Fauda* has proven to promote the IDF and increase conscription in the very same.[26] The show also supports Israel's narrative that every death on the Israeli side is an outcome of Palestinian terrorism whereas deaths on the Palestinian side are always related to the prevention of more terrorism.[27] In addition, many of its fans indicated on Twitter and IMDB that they consider the show a source for information about the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict.[28]

Method

To not only determine the portrayal of Palestinians in *Fauda* but also its influence on the perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the international community's perception thereof, I will first analyse the show's content in a textual analysis. Secondly, I will analyse reactions to the show to determine whether the show has a significant influence on its audience that could pose a change in the policy on the ground.

Textual Analysis

The textual analysis of *Fauda* is concerned with analysing the show's content. This part of the analysis includes the show's components presented on screen like style, plot, dialogue, and music. After watching all three seasons of *Fauda*, I determined four main topics and themes of analysis: (a) The characters' professional occupations, (b) the acts of violence shown in the program, (c) the portrayal of women, and (d) religion. These topics accompany a general analysis of the different portrayal of the Israeli and Palestinian characters on the show.

Qualitative data analysis, in contrast to quantitative data analysis, is not only concerned with the collection and editing of data but emphasises its interpretation.[29] This is especially relevant for studies concerned with a small number of samples. Qualitative data analysis also allows for a deeper engagement with the sample at hand. *Fauda*, I will show, is set in a complex environment of conflict and imperialism. The collection and presentation of data alone would therefore not be meaningful. This method allows for the interpretation of the show's content providing the hard data for tangible, concrete, and sturdy argumentation. At the same time, it

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[26] Nahuel Ribke, "Fauda television series and the turning of asymmetrical conflict into television entertainment," *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 41(8), (2019): 1250.

[27] Ian Black, *Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917-2017*, (London: Allen Lane, 2017): 3.

[28] See chapter 3.

[29] Margit Schreier, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2013): 170ff.

offers room for interpretation and engagement with the show's context and plot.[30] Qualitative data analysis will account for the analysis of violence and the professional occupations in the show. The subject of violence contributes to the audience's perception of the characters and their morality. Professional occupations similarly determine a character's prestige and power.

Two of the major themes visible in *Fauda*, the portrayal of women and religion, as well as the overall different portrayal of the two population groups, are hard to translate to hard data. Therefore, a different method must be applied. In comparative film analysis two films are usually the object of research and comparison. In this case however, different groups within the show will be contrasted. For the portrayal of women, a comparison to the portrayal of the men in the show[31] seemed the obvious choice. However, not only do the women in the show need to be compared to the men, the portrayal of Israeli women in contrast to Palestinian women necessitates comparison as well. In either pair three aspects need to be considered. First, the character's profession is of interest to determine their perceived standing in society. Both the portrayed differences between the sexes as well as the comparison between the populations of the respective states will reveal the ascribed power and prestige. Second, the differences in behaviour will be highlighted. For the different portrayals of men and women I will focus on the way they deal with violence. For the differences in the portrayal of Israeli and Palestinian women, their sexuality, interaction with other women, and their interaction with men will account for the biggest part of the comparison. Third, the differences in their storylines will be analysed, emphasising who the driving force in the plot is, as well as the question of if the women in *Fauda* have their own storylines or, if they appear as mere appendages to men. For the issue of the generalisation of a population the Israeli and Palestinian characters, both male and female, will be compared. The focus of the comparison is the portrayal of characters as individuals opposed to their portrayal as a mere part of a unitary group. Therefore, the plots of the different characters will be analysed looking for the existence of individual decisions and actions. For example, in the existence of scenes that do not include other main or side characters or, actions that are not relevant for advancing the plot but are simply there to give the audience a deeper understanding of a character. Alongside the storylines, the diversity of characters will be analysed. This includes different socio-economical, educational, occupational, and ideological backgrounds.

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[30] Schreier, "Qualitative."

[31] As none of the characters is shown to identify as non-gender-binary this comparison will be made considering two genders only.

Additionally, the comparative film analysis will play a vital role in the interpretation of the data collected in the first step of the qualitative data analysis.

Para-Textual Analysis

Finally, this thesis is devoted to the reception and influence of a popular show like *Fauda*. The para-textual analysis is concerned with everything about the show that cannot be seen on screen. This includes its political context, the people involved in creating the show, its background, and its perception. This part of the analysis can be separated into three main parts. First, the analysis of critiques of *Fauda* published in print or online newspapers, amongst them the *New York Times*, *The Time*, *Haaretz*, *Jadaliyya*, *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Toronto Sun*.[32] In addition to the analysis of articles in the above-mentioned news outlets, Nahuel Ribke's article "Fauda Television Series and the Turning of Asymmetrical Conflict into Television Entertainment"[33] will be consulted for information on critiques published in Hebrew in Israeli newspapers. The analysis of audience reviews on the movie and television critique website IMDB, as well as reviews on the social media platform Twitter, constitute the second and third part respectively of the para-textual analysis. As internationally used websites, both Twitter an IMDB show a wide array of opinions and reviews that reveal the international influence and reception of the show. The para-textual analysis therefore serves the purpose of deciphering the reviews *Fauda* received. Not only will I focus on the content of the reviews and if they are inherently negative or positive, but I will also elaborate on their authors. It is of special interest if the authors of the articles critique, review, and/or reflect on the political setting of the show as such a reflection would indicate influence in the audience's understanding of the conflict. Furthermore, I will be looking out for an indication of change or confirmation in their prior beliefs and opinions on the Arab-Israeli conflict and lastly, if indicated, the author's identity.

Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis is not only to analysis *Fauda*'s content but its audience's perception of the show. In this thesis I aim to show that the series has the potential to significantly influence its audience. I argue that the representation of Palestinians in the show as terrorists and savages contributes to Israel's justification of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. I aim to show how *Fauda* justifies the occupation and consequently influences its audience's perception of Palestinians, Arabs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Through the worldwide distribution of *Fauda*

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[32] Chosen were newspapers with a large readership as well as those much-discussed articles were published in. The assumption is that these newspapers reach the largest readership and are therefore the most influential.
[33] Ribke, "Fauda."

via Netflix, the Israeli narrative of the conflict reaches international audiences and contributes to the international communities' take on the conflict.

1. Israeli Television Production

Israeli television production is a relatively new field. The first, and for a period sole national broadcasting network was founded in 1968. However, Israeli television production took off from there and a multitude of different networks that wanted a share in the new market followed.[34] But even with the fast growth of the field, the development of the industry of television drama production took until the 1990s, to fully establish itself. Previously, Israeli television production was limited to soap operas and comedic low budget and quality productions.[35] In an attempt to prevent the flooding of Israeli television with low quality programming, the Israeli legislation required private Israeli broadcasting stations to play a certain amount of high quality television programs, measured by the time and money used to produce an hour of television, which led to the mass broadcasting of highly acclaimed international series.[36] The trend to broadcast high quality international television, notably US American and British series, has continued to the present as one can see looking into the programming of *Yes Oh*, the channel that first broadcast *Fauda* in 2015 before it was bought by *Netflix*. *Yes* was established in 1998 as Israel's first, and to date only, satellite television network and started broadcasting in 2000. The *Yes* network consists of several channels like *Yes Oh, Yes Comedy* and others. The channel broadcasts a multitude of critically acclaimed shows like *Girls, Game of Thrones, Downton Abbey,* and *The Americans*.[37] When Israeli television production started up in the 1990s, series with an emphasis on quality, innovation, and realism were as much part of the industry as soap operas. The mirroring of everyday life and commentary on social issues were deemed necessary for these critically acclaimed television programs made in Israel as the newly established industry needed a unique selling point to compete with big US, and glossy Turkish productions.[38] Israeli television found its niche in realistic styling and socio-political commentary.

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[34] Noa Lavie, "Israeli drama: constructing the Israeli 'quality' television series as an art form," Media, Culture & Society, Vol. 37(1), (2015): 21.
[35] Lavie, "Israeli drama," 23ff.
[36] Lavie, "Israeli drama," 23.
[37] "Yes," LinkedIn, last accessed 20. April 2021, https://www.linkedin.com/company/yes-television?originalSubdomain=il.
[38] Lavie, "Israeli drama," 23.

1.1 The Representation of Palestinians in Israeli Television and Film

Fauda has been a highly controversial show from its first broadcast in 2015. On the one hand, it was praised for its allegedly realistic and "humane" representation of Palestinians while, on the other hand, it was heavily criticized for its trivialization of discrimination of Palestinians in Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Israel's role in the very same. To this day, *Fauda* also receives criticism for its "sympathetic" portrayal of terrorists.[39] The controversy came to the international community's attention when *Netflix* picked up the show in 2016 and made it available to an international audience. I argue that the praise *Fauda* received has little to do with an accurate representation of Palestinians, but rather, with the development in the representation of Palestinians and the Israeli Defense Forces in comparison to past series and films. To fully understand these changes, and especially because of the short amount of time that television has been produced in Israel on a large scale, the consideration of the portrayal of Palestinians as well as the portrayal of the Israeli military in Israeli film is helpful and necessary. As *Fauda* claims to portray Palestinians realistically and is heavily inspired by news broadcasting from Palestine, two documentaries will be considered as well. *Fauda* falls into a difficult niche. It is clearly fiction but so heavily inspired by its creators' concept of reality and characters based on real people that its audience at times had trouble understanding which parts were real and which were not.[40] *Fauda* has therefore received similar criticism to previous documentaries.

In the 1950s and 1960s the representation of Palestinians took the form of "non-human appendages"[41] as Oded Nir stated in his 2019 article *Fauda and Crisis*. Palestinians in movies at the time simply fulfilled the function of creating an "other" that the heroes of the story could test their belief systems and values against.[42] Similar to indigenous Americans in western films, Palestinians formed an "angry mob" for the protagonists to fight and win against.[43] In fiction films, the inhumane representation of the 50s and 60s turned in to a satirical portrayal of minorities in general, and Palestinians in particular, in the 1970s. This transformation from a perceived source of threat to a source of laughter and victim of mockery is often connected to

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[39] See chapter 3.2 and 3.3.
[40] Avi Issacharoff, "How an Israeli Journalist's Coverage of the Palestinian Conflict Inspired 'Fauda'," Interviewed by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, NPR, 23. August 2018, audio: https://www.npr.org/2018/08/23/641094305/how-an-israeli-journalists-coverage-of-the-palestinian-conflict-inspired-fauda
[41] Nir, "Fauda", 127.
[42] Munk, "Fauda," 481ff. Ribke, "Fauda," 1247.
[43] Munk, "Fauda," 481.

Israel's success in the six-day-war.[44] The period featured overdrawn accents, stereotypes, and ridiculous costumes.[45] Bosmat Garami ascribes the satirical representation to the attempt to create a single Israeli identity, he describes as "new" and "masculine", which rejects the prominent role religion takes in the lives of minorities, including Orthodox Jews, and emphasizes secular, Zionist nationalism.[46] In documentaries however, Palestinians continued portrayed as inhumane enemies rather than people. In *Pillars of Fire*, a documentary series about the formation and history of Israel, produced in the 1970s by the state television channel,[47] Palestinians, and Arabs in general, are portrayed to be war loving savages in contrast to the peace loving, civilized Israelis. All while promoting the ethos of the empty land, Jewish victimhood, and what Garami calls "purity of arms" meaning the narrative that Israelis, although inferior in men and arms, were chosen to win the wars they were confronted with, relating their situation back to the story of David and Goliath.[48] The 1980s showed early signs of a more nuanced portrayal of Arabs and a first examination and reconsideration of Israeli preconceptions of minority groups. The 80s also brought along an artistic movement with the goal to normalize Arab-Israeli relations.[49] It remains questionable if *Fauda* could be seen in the light of a project of approximation. Nir argues that *Fauda* merely fulfils the requirements of minimal political correctness to be accepted by its audience in this day and age, but remains far from an activist project to better relations in Israel and the occupied territories.[50] In the 1990s, another documentary exemplifies the progression of the portrayal of Palestinians. *Tkumah* quite like *Pillars of Fire* addresses the history of Israel and was produced by the same state-owned television channel. In stark contrast to *Pillars of Fire*, *Tkumah* does not determine 1948 and the creation of Israel as an ultimate goal but more so as beginning of a series of traumatic events.[51] It lays emphasis on the constant interconnectedness of Palestinians and Israelis instead of portraying two morally opposite parties.[52] *Tkumah* was also one of the first programs broadcast on Israeli television that gave a voice to "regular" Palestinians. This was a new concept even for documentary film. Instead of only interviewing politicians or Palestinian fighters, the documentary showed interviews with people that were not directly involved in wars but

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44 Munk, "Fauda," 483.
45 Miri Talmon, "A Touch Away from Cultural Others: Negotiating Israeli Jewish Identity on Television," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Volume 31, Number 2, (Winter 2013): 8.
46 Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 29ff.
47 Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 28.
48 Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 47.
49 Nir, "Fauda and Crisis," 128.
50 Nir, "Fauda and Crisis," 128.
51 Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 30.
52 Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 32.

experienced their consequences.[53] Although very different in their approach, both *Tkumah* and *Pillars of Fire* fell victim to the same critique: the accusation of being too sympathetic with Palestinians.[54]

From the 2000s and 2010s several examples, a bit closer to *Fauda* in format and style, can be considered. One of them is *Hatufim*. The Israeli show was first broadcast in 2010 and revolves around two Israeli soldiers captured in the Lebanese war, coming home after 17 years in a Syrian prison. Just like *Fauda,* the show revolves around the struggle the two face in adapting back to civilian life. After finding out one of their believed-to-be-dead comrades might still be alive, the two soldiers start their own, unauthorized mission into Syrian territory – a motive also repeated in *Fauda*. While *Hatufim* was notable for breaking the taboo of the fictional processing of war imprisonment, the representation of Palestinians in *Hatufim* can quite simply be described as orientalist and stereotypical, in the portrayal of their actions as well as in the portrayal of their physical appearance. The Palestinians are only "needed" to create obstacles for the protagonist of the show and are not given agency. The Palestinian characters are instrumentalized to create an Israeli identity by offsetting it. The same can be said for the films *Lebanon* (2009) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). *Lebanon* followed the story of an Israeli tank crew on a mission in Israel. The film was critically recognized for its unique setting as the entire movie was set inside a tank. *Waltz with Bashir* on the other hand, followed the story of a former soldier of the same war, trying to recollect his memory of his time in the war and his part in the massacre of Shatila and Sabra in 1982. It is lauded as very gripping, highly praised film, half documentary and half fantastic animation. Although both films portray a much more differentiated and nuanced image of Palestinians, agency was never given to them. Viewers only see the Palestinian characters portrayed as enemies or victims. They do not get to make their own decisions or take action and their existence is limited to appearances in somebody else's story.

All the examples given portray the major themes running through Israeli television running up to the production of *Fauda*. First, all the examples mentioned have war as their main topic. All of them follow Israeli soldiers' journeys either in or after the war. In this portrayal Palestinians in the films and shows are the quite literally the enemy. The main characters, the ones the audience is strongest connected to, are scared by their interaction with the Palestinian characters. As a result an unbiased view of the characters becomes almost impossible. Secondly,

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[53] Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 36.
[54] Garami, "1948 Palestine War," 51.

all the soldiers have to endure an immense amount of suffering that connects the viewers to them, generates empathy, and leads to the constitution of a hero ethos.

While Palestinians are portrayed in different ways, one might even argue realistically and sympathetically in some cases, they never attain any kind of agency. They do not have their own storylines or decisions, the audience is not introduced to the Palestinian characters' emotions, thought processes, or lives, if not in direct relation to the main, Jewish-Israeli characters' lives. Palestinians are present, but as bystanders, enemies, victims, or a source of guilt for the protagonists, not fully developed characters with their own storylines. In *Waltz with Bashir*, although portrayed sympathetically, Palestinian characters only play a role in the main character's development and search for his past. Even interactions between Palestinians and Israelis are limited to shooting and violence. Later in the film the main character walks through the streets of Shatila and Sabra and the audience feels his shock discovering the cruel attacks that took place there in the night before. The audience does not feel the terror of the victims being shot and hunted down for hours in the night or get to see it from their perspectives. The Palestinians in *Waltz with Bashir* play a passive role. *Lebanon* includes several scenes that show interactions between the crew of a tank and their Palestinian prisoner. However, what the audience learns about the Palestinian prisoner is limited to the facts impacting the Israeli main characters' lives. It draws a picture of the Israeli war experience and trauma, not however the Palestinian experience. This is what I argue to be the source of why many claim *Fauda* to be ground-breaking in its portrayal of Palestinians. The mere portrayal of Palestinian characters with their own storylines arouses praise without the consideration of the context and kind of storyline or agency portrayed. I argue that the real innovation in *Fauda* is the agency given to its Palestinian characters, these characters and their storylines however still contribute to the justification of the occupation of Palestine and are full of stereotypes and orientalist images.

1.2 Producers, Creators, Cast, and Crew

Fauda was created by Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff. The former member of a mista'arvim[55] unite of the Israeli Defense Forces and the journalist specialized in the Middle East and Arab affairs[56] met in 2011 when they found they had a similar dream: to portray the Arab-Israeli

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[55] From Arabic *musta'rib*; Those who live amongst Arabs, or in its modern translation Arabist.
[56] "Avi Issacharoff Biography," Haaretz, last accessed 15. March 2021, https://www.haaretz.com/1.5032038

conflict in a different light and to tell the story of the Israeli "Heroes" behind closed doors.[57] [58] Their idea was to process their experiences in the format of a television series and create a show filled with "well rounded" characters on either side. As Raz said in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, the criteria for the characters they created for the show was for them to be so well developed and interesting that he would want to play every single one of them – no matter good or bad.[59] *Fauda* is therefore heavily influenced by Raz' and Issacharoff's personal experiences and struggles, even a lot of the storylines are adapted from their own lives.[60]

Just like Raz, several members of the *Fauda* cast have a military past that exceeds the mandatory military service.[61] The set of *Fauda* is made up of an interesting cast and crew which is partly related to its controversial theme. The set is one of only a few film and television sets consisting of a mixed Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli cast and crew. Noa Lavie and Amal Jamal conducted research on the set of *Fauda* and found an interesting dynamic on the set with already difficult working conditions.[62] The two researchers from the academic college in Tel Aviv – Jaffa found a hierarchy in cast and crew[63] with Arab-Israelis mostly occupying supporting roles and less prestigious positions within the crew like drivers or grips.[64] Unsurprisingly, considering the Arab-Israeli population's struggles with discrimination in every sector of the Israeli labor market,[65] the Arab-Israeli members of the cast notably stressed the need for professional behavior on set, how important it is to have the reputation to be easy to work with, and to leave politics out of it.[66] This claim seems unrealistic and naïve judging by the portrayal of the actors of *Fauda* in the media. Luna Mansour, who plays the role of Marwa in *Fauda*'s second season, claims she did not see a problem with taking part in the production of the show. While former cast mates like Salim Dau stated that they would not take a part in *Fauda* again due to its "bloodthirsty" portrayal of Palestinians, Mansour sees the show as an opportunity and

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[57] The Lawfare Podcast. 2017.

[58] Megan Harrison, "Q&A: Lior Raz, creator and lead actor of Fauda, appears in Ottawa, Sunday," *Ottawa Citizen*, 24. February 2017, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/q-a-lior-raz-fauda-creator-and-lead-actor.

[59] Harrison, "Q&A."

[60] Harrison, "Q&A."

[61] "Tsahi Halevi," IMDB, last accessed 12. March 2021, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5674436/. "Tomer Capon," IMDB, last accessed 12. March 2021, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6150071/.

[62] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1045ff. Lavie and Jamal conducted their research on season two of *Fauda* which was shot in summer. Long working days under extreme heat were the norm.

[63] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1047.

[64] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1048.

[65] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1042.

[66] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1047. Abed El Rahman Natour, "Fauda: A Conversation with the Arab Translator of the Show," *Pod Academy*, 6. July 2020, audio: https://open.spotify.com/episode/4MsWWiFe0jq6pepxulvVRX?si=388bb9adfe3b4882.

career springboard. However, Mansour says she is often confronted with her decisions as well as her identity as an Arab-Israeli, both by journalists and by the audience.[67] Mansour's castmate Tsahi Halevi, who plays an undercover agent named Naor, got a feel for just how political his role is when he got married to Arab-Israeli TV presenter Lucy Aharish. The two got huge backlash on social media criticizing their interracial relationship. It went so far that politicians took to social media to criticize the couple. Oren Hazan of the Likud party called for a stop to "Jewish assimilation", stating he would not blame Aharish for "seducing a jewish soul" but saying she was "welcome to convert". He went on to say, "I do blame Tzachi 'the Islamicizing' Halevy, who took Fauda a step too far".[68] Arye Dery, minister of the Interior, said in a radio interview he believes Aharish did not want to harm Israel, implying that she did exactly that, and suggested conversion.[69]

Furthermore, Lavie and Jamal noted quite different moods among the different parts of the cast and crew. While Arab-Israeli actors were clearly more affected by the filming of difficult scenes, like interrogations, the atmosphere among the Jewish-Israeli members of cast and crew seemed to be more stress-free although all participants seemed uncomfortable.[70] Also notable was the separation on set. Lavie and Jamal noted that Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli actors and crew member did not interact a lot on set.[71]

The first season of *Fauda* was produced by Maria Feldman and Liat Benasuly, who have collaborated on several projects before. The two of them were joined by David Betzer for season two and three. All three of them have experience in the production of Israeli television. Feldman is a New York based producer specializing in international productions. She co-founded two production companies and was involved in shows like *Hatufim*, *Homeland,* the US American adaption of *Hatufim, False Flag,* and *No Man's Land,* all of which have a similar military theme and somewhat realistic styling. Benasuly is an Israeli producer and founded her own production company. She was also involved in *Hatufim* and *False Flag* and produced shows like *Messiah* and *Dig*. Betzer is Israeli as well and similarly to Feldman and Benasuly is quite experienced in Israeli television production. On top of the war and soldier films *Sh'at Neila* and *Rak LeHayom,* he also produced the police comedy *Hashoter Hatov.* In the biographies of these

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[67] Itay Stern, "'Fauda': Just Entertainment or Art Reflecting the Damage of the Occupation?," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 30. August 2019.

[68] Vered Adir and David Bachar, "'She seduced a Jew': Lawmaker Bemoans Wedding of Fauda Star to Israeli Arab TV Anchor," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 11. October 2018.

[69] Adir, Bachar, "She seduced a Jew," 2018.

[70] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1050.

[71] Lavie, Jamal, "Constructing," 1047.

producers, *Fauda* can be considered the logical next step in a career filled with similar projects. *Fauda*, however, stands out in its international success.

1.3 Conclusion

Considering past film and television production in Israel, *Fauda* follows in the footsteps of similar shows regarding its portrayal of Palestinians. However, compared to past shows, *Fauda* does make a big advance in the agency of the Palestinian characters. The Palestinian characters in the show, although portrayed very stereotypically and mostly in a negative light, make independent decisions, and get their own storylines. The audience gets insight into their emotions and motivations although their portrayal is still riddled with prejudice that might be connected to the show's creators professional background in the Israeli military and its producers' prior involvement in similar productions.

2. Analysis

This chapter is dedicated to the systematic, textual analysis of *Fauda*. The role of professional occupations, violence, religion, and women will be considered. Before going into the analysis, I will establish a few fundamental differences in the representation of Palestinians and Israelis in the show.

Fauda does not make a secret of "othering"[72] the Palestinian characters in the show. Maggie Griffith William and Jenny Korn observed othering in the children's show *Thomas and Friends* and noted that othering in the show is expressed through differences in the appearance of the characters such as different colour schemes. *Fauda*, similarly, builds its image of Palestinians around clothing and an overall appearance that differs from the Israeli's, while centering the show around an "Israeli" identity.[73] For example, right in the beginning of season one, the audience sees the IDF team prepare to go undercover to a wedding. The whole team changes outfits, and the men paint their beards black. This first scene of changing to "fit in" might be justified. Some of the IDF member need to act as servers, others as guests, a certain amount of dressing up might be in order. However, the theme of changing before going to Palestinian territory is one that runs throughout the entire show, and in certain moments, becomes almost laughable. The Israeli characters start changing from a basic, new, grey t-shirt into a washed-out, grey polo shirt, as if new t-shirts are something you could not own if you were Palestinian. Small, casual acts like this are repeated in the show to convey to the audience that these two territories, these two peoples are not the same. They are different. But most fundamentally, it becomes very clear which one is more "modern" and "developed."

Although appearance is a main difference in the different portrayal of the two opposing sides in *Fauda*, I argue that the biggest difference in the portrayal of the two groups in total is that Israelis are portrayed as individual, yet loyal characters. The Palestinians on the other hand, are portrayed as part of a bigger collective. Additionally, compared to the Israeli characters the Palestinians are perceived as distrustful. Even though the break of trust and loyalty on the Palestinian side happens under pressure and mistreatment by Israeli characters, it still reflects badly on the Palestinian characters, and therefore on Palestinians in general. The lack of loyalty

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[72] Edward W. Said, Orientalism, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978). Alia Al-Saji, "The Radicalization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, No. 8 (2010).
[73] Maggie Griffith Williams and Jenny Korn, "Othering and Fear: Cultural Values and Hiro's Race in Thomas & Friends' Hero of the Rails," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 41(1), (2017): 24ff.

might imply two things. Firstly, in contrast to the Israelis, the Palestinians are portrayed not to be a unit. This makes it hard for the audience to see the Palestinians' agenda for a free Palestine as a collective goal but rather makes them appear caught up in a mob fight. Secondly it implies that the Palestinians are not reliable as partners in peace. If they betray each other this easily, surely, they cannot be trusted to keep a complex peace treaty.

To draw the comparison, Israeli characters, especially the main IDF characters, are portrayed to be very diverse in their behavior, their opinions and their personalities. The characters fight a lot, mostly about how different missions should be carried out but always with good intent and always with the aim to save the largest number of people. Sometimes they get caught up in personal differences and get in fights about love. While all Israeli main or side characters are portrayed to be strong individuals with strong opinions, they certainly do not all get along. However, when they find themselves in dangerous situations, the Israeli characters, and above all the members of the IDF, stand up for one another. They risk their lives to save others and go on missions important to other members of the team, even when they do not agree with the purpose of the mission. In this sense they are portrayed in similar way to a family. They fight, they disagree, they make up and they show up. All the members of the team know each other, each other's spouses and partners, each other's children and sometimes even each other's siblings. Their job becomes a source of bonding, a base to build their lives on. Everything revolves around "the Team." Israeli characters getting captured and tortured never give up information, never throw each other under the bus, and they never betray their values or their missions because of physical or mental threat. Furthermore, they put their principles above the rules or orders. The Israeli characters get to form real connections and relationships that accompany them throughout the series.

Palestinian characters on the other hand, the portrayal of the Palestinian characters lacks this sense of individuality and independence. They all follow the same goals – committing and covering up terrorist attacks – their style of dress is the same, and the main characters' personalities do not show great variety. When they fight it is about power, love, and only twice about the methods used to achieve their common goal – terrorism.[74] The Palestinian characters are all closely related by family ties, friendships, and through the organizations they are part of – mainly Hamas. In contrast to the Israeli characters, Palestinians always give in under torture and give away other's hideouts and plans. When pressured, the Palestinian characters always

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[74] *Fauda.* Season 2, Episode 12. Abu Samara and Nidal argue about the kidnapping of a child and the decapitation of a former Israeli Soldier.

choose to collaborate with the Israeli authorities. Of course, they are in a much more difficult position than their Israeli counterparts. They get tempted by healthcare for their children and safety for their families and threatened by physical violence, not just against them but loved ones or even their unborn children. Still the image constructed is quite different to the one painted of the Israeli characters. There is no development of long-lasting relationships the audience gets to be part of. However, the Palestinians, just like the Israelis, put their mission above much else. Sadly, the Palestinians' mission in *Fauda* is reduced to inflicting pain and killing as many Israelis as possible.

Disputes between the Palestinian characters usually do not end with a big fight but with shots, deaths, and wounds, promoting the image of violent Arabs.[75] Their differences are not resolved and they turn against each other, physically or by turning each other into the Israeli authorities. Palestinians that want to escape the spiral of violence are pressured by the families and friends to participate in terrorist acts if they do not want to be considered a collaborator as is the case with season three's main antagonist.[76]

While the Palestinian characters pursue the same goals and are portrayed to be very similar, they do not manage to come together but are pulled apart by their love for power[77] or their pride. The Israeli characters on the other hand have different goals and personalities yet manage to come together through the love for their country and their shared values. This gives a very one-sided image to the audience and while that might be obvious after thorough analysis it is not so obvious watching the show and being caught up in the action and plot twists. This subconscious influence leads its audience to internalize stereotypes without questioning them - deliberately or not.

2.1 Professional Occupations

Just like in John Seggar's and Jenny Wheeler's 1973 study on the professional occupations of characters in television series, the characters' jobs are of great interest in the analysis of *Fauda*. Seggar and Wheeler observed the significant increase in the representation of people of colour

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[75] Amit Lavie-Dinur and Yuval Karniel, "National Identity and the Representation of Palestinian Arab Women's 'Otherness' in Reality Shows on Israeli Commercial Television," *Critical Studies in Television*, Volume 8, No. 1, (2013): 62ff.
[76] *Fauda*. Season 3. Episode 1-3.
[77] Shaheen, *The TV Arab*, 176ff.

on television and lay focus on the prestige and power that came with the respective profession.[78] Similarly, in this research the focus within the topic of the characters' occupations lays on the differences in power and reputation that go hand in hand with the professional occupations of the Palestinian and the Israeli characters, as well as the education or training required to exercise their occupations, and the level of threat accompanying a certain profession. The question of the characters' occupations is relevant for two main reasons. Firstly, the levels of power and prestige as well as the required training for a certain profession immensely shape the audience's perception of the group of characters.[79] With more characters living under occupation working in high prestige positions such as doctors, judges, and teachers, the image of Palestinians under occupation progresses simply by the reputation these professions enjoy in society. The Palestinian characters are portrayed to be trustworthy, educated, and smart. A higher percentage of Palestinians in high esteem professions shown in the series reflect back on the entire group, lifting their standing and image. A high level of education connected to the characters' professions is relevant as it plays into their prestige on the one hand and challenges arguments for an occupation on the grounds of a state of underdevelopment and lack of education on the other.[80] Extra attention needs to be paid to the power connected to a position as it can have several implications. Characters portrayed as working in powerful, official positions, such as politicians, can convey the feeling of good order, which would invalidate the arguments speaking for an occupation due to a lack of ability of the occupied to govern themselves. In *Fauda* only one such character come to mind. Abu Maher, head of the Palestinian Preventative Security, seems genuinely invested in keeping peace in Israel and Palestine. In season two however we find out that his own son is part of a terrorist organisation, planting bugs in his father's office and undermining his authority and power.

The exact opposite, however, is seen when characters in powerful positions misuse their power or hold powerful positions in illegal organisations, such as the leaders of terrorist organisations in *Fauda*. Although these roles surely carry a lot of power, they might seemingly justify intervention by the Israeli state and its military, both in "self-defence" and for the safety of the inhabitants themselves.[81] Secondly, a character's occupation in this context of conflict potentially poses a threat to the Israeli state and its citizens, and therefore possibly provides

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[78] Fiske, Hartley, *Reading Television*, 11. John F. Seggar and Penny Wheeler, "World of work on TV: Ethnic and sex representation in TV drama," *Journal of broadcasting*, 17(2), (1973).
[79] Seggar, Wheeler, "World," 203.
[80] Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, (Blackwell Publishing 2004): 47ff.
[81] Greogry, *Colonial Present*, 17ff. Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia: and the Politics of Empire*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

justification for the occupation of, or violent action against, Palestinians. As this is a show about the hunt of an infamous terrorist, the question of the threat people in a certain position pose is very much relevant. However, not just the terrorist in the show can be considered threatening. The members of the IDF would fall into this category as well, as in this thesis a threatening position shall be defined by the characters' knowledge and ability to harm as well as their access to weapons.

For the data on professional occupations and the overall positions of characters, only characters with a speaking role were considered.[82] This includes all the (a) main characters, hereby defined as regularly appearing characters with individual storyline that appear in at least 80% of episodes from their first appearance to their last, and have appearances in at least 4 episodes, (b) side characters, defined as regularly appearing characters without individual storylines, or such characters that have individual storylines but do not fulfil the criteria for main characters, and (c) minor characters, defined as characters that only appear in a single episode but have at least one conversation with one of the main or regular side characters.

Table 1.1. Characters

	Total	Israelis	Palestinians
Men	61	19	41
- Main characters	13	9	5
- Side characters	33	7	24
- Minor characters	15	3	12
Women	24	11	13
- Main characters	6	3	3
- Side characters	10	4	6
- Minor characters	8	4	4
Total	85	30	54

Over 36 episodes the audience is introduced to a total of 85 characters with a speaking role. Of these 30 are Israelis and 54 are Palestinian. This asymmetry is due to the fact that the Palestinian cast of the show is almost completely replaced every season, creating new antagonists for the Israeli characters to fight against. This makes the asymmetry between the 12 Israeli characters considered main characters and their only 8 counterparts especially

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[82] There are far more Palestinian non-speaking characters in *Fauda* than Israeli. This has to do with the setting of the show. Most scenes in public settings are set in Palestine meaning that background actors are mostly Palestinian pedestrians. Apart from scenes in streets, markets, cafes, and barbershops quite a few scenes were shot in hospitals showing medical staff. Generally, this group is considered prestigious as we do not get to know them or their intentions and other Palestinian characters in these occupations reflect badly on this group, I do not feel confident making a statement about the non-speaking characters in *Fauda*.

notable. It shows that the newly introduced characters do not get the same in-depth storylines and character development that the Israeli characters get.

To define the characters' occupations, the role the characters were shown in the most was considered. In practice, this means that students that were only shown in a classroom once, but in several terrorist operations, were considered as terrorists. The ones that were shown in a classroom several times, but only supporting or helping with one terrorist operation or supporting characters classified as terrorists, were classified as students. This logic applies to all the characters in the show. Furthermore, the characters did not necessarily need to be shown practising their professional occupations, sometimes they would just say what their occupation was. This differs from de Fleur's research on professional occupations in television[83] as this research is not laid out to build a framework for a power index but apply it.

Table 1.2. Professional Occupations

Palestinians		Israelis	
- Terrorist	23	- Special Forces	12
- Doctor	3	- Prison Ward	2
- Housewife	3	- Students	2
- Student	3	- IDF Gaza Desk	1
- PPS Guard/Employee	2	- Special Forces Bureau	1
- Medical personnel	2	- Doctors	1
- Barber	2	- Housewife	1
- Religious leader	2	- Barkeeper	1
- PPS leadership	1	- Politician	1
- Judge	1	- Soldier	1
- Teacher	1	- Farmer	1
- Physiotherapist	1	- Military Commander	1
- Policeman (Hamas)	1	- Social Worker	1
- Hamas Bureau Gaza	1	- Unknown	5
- Prison Ward	1		
- Unknown	7		
Total	54	Total	30

Looking at the data on the characters' professional occupations, it becomes very clear that Palestinians are portrayed as a threat, judging by the 42,6 percent of characters whose main occupation is terrorism. Apart from terrorists however, 24,1 percent of the Palestinian

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[83] Melvin L. De Fleur, "Occupational Roles as Portrayed on Television," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (Spring 1964).

characters work in high prestige jobs such as in the medical field, in law, are students, or religious leaders. This could offer a sufficient counterweight and restore the audience's image of Palestinians. Taking a closer look at the characters' storylines however, one sees that most of these characters are in some way closely connected to terrorism as well. The judge, for example, is a close relative of season one's main terrorist and works for the Jordan wing of the terrorist Hamas organisation. To fulfil Jack Shaheen's observation of Palestinians as nerve gassing terrorists,[84] we see him smuggle sarin, a highly poisonous nerve gas, into Palestine to be used in a fatal terror attack.[85] In addition, we learn that he is corrupt.[86] So although we are introduced to a Palestinian working in a high prestige job[87] our trust in him is immediately shattered by his involvement in a terrorist operation and willingness to take advantage of his position in society, even bragging about how easy it is to smuggle nerve gas past Israelis with a high prestige occupation like his. The three doctors, although not part of the terrorist organisation per se, only need the smallest amount of convincing to help hide and heal a terrorist, or directly work for terrorists. One of them, Dr. Shirin al-Abed, even helps to operate on a prisoner and plant a bomb in his abdomen, an act that can only be described as torture. The physiotherapist follows her example when only the smallest effort is needed to convince him to shoot one of his patients, a member of the IDF, and he is only stopped mere seconds before killing his patient by a team of IDF members.[88] One of the religious leaders is deeply involved in Hamas' operations just like one of the three students. All these characters, although considered prestigious, lose the audience's respect and fail to generate understanding, empathy, or benevolence for the Palestinians by collaborating with the terrorist.[89]

The Israeli characters' occupations are even less diverse. Even though they occupy different professions to the Palestinian characters, overall the audience finds a similar representation. The Israeli side exhibits a smaller number of different occupations but at the same time a smaller number of characters in total. A total of 53.3% of Israeli characters work for the Israeli defence forces or the military and have the potential to be highly prestigious. The whole point of *Fauda*, according to its creators,[90] however, is not to build members of the IDF up as heroes but show the difficulties and downsides the job brings. *Fauda* is meant to show that "the good guys" are not that good at all. And although members of the special forces in

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[84] Jack G. Shaheen, "Hollywood's Muslim Arabs," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 90, (2000): 25ff
[85] *Fauda*. Season 1. Episode 10.
[86] *Fauda*. Season 1. Episode 11.
[87] Fiske, Hartley, *Reading Television*, 8.
[88] *Fauda.* Season 3. Episode 12.
[89] *Fauda* season 1-3.
[90] Tel Aviv Review, "How Did," 2018.

Fauda are highly flawed and unprofessional somehow every unauthorised mission has a positive outcome that saves lives. Every lie leads to the capture or killing of a high-profile terrorist. Every personal revenge is in line with the requirements of their mission.

There are some Israeli characters in high prestige positions that are simply "bad guys" like the Minister of Defence who, as we find out, is highly corrupt and was involved in the murder of Palestinian prisoners.[91]

In contrast however to the doctors on the Palestinian side, the one Israeli doctor is a nice, responsible, and highly competent man. He takes loving care of his Palestinian patient, the young daughter of a Palestinian terrorist.[92] And while the other professional occupations on the Israeli side might not be especially prestigious, they are just what they seem. The barkeeper is a barkeeper, and on top of that one that is killed in a terrorist attack. The social worker is a social worker and not in any way related to hate or violence against Palestinians and so on. On the Palestinian side however, a character introduced as physiotherapist almost becomes a murderer, the doctor is a torturer, and the judge deeply involved in a terrorist operation.

Considering the similar representation of Israelis and Palestinians in different professional fields, the real difference between Israeli and Palestinian characters in regard to their profession is not that one side is depicted as less educated or in less prestigious occupations but that the Israeli popular majority, people that have nothing to do with the military of the special forces, is represented whereas the Palestinian majority is not. This phenomenon can be related back to the representation of Palestinians only as a means to offset Israeli identity - as elaborated on in the introduction. This is problematic for two major reasons. Firstly, it takes away from all the innocent Palestinians not actively involved in the conflict, therefore legitimizing violent or political action against all Palestinians. Secondly, it distorts the audience's image of Palestinians by making a minority, Palestinians involved in terrorist organisations, a majority. Palestinians in *Fauda* are therefore denied normality. They either serve as antagonists to fight against, or victims to fight for. Either option serves to justify Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

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[91] Fauda. Season 1. Episode 9.
[92] Fauda. Season 1. Episode 9ff.

2.2 The Use of Violence

In television and film, the portrayal of violence is a popular tool to spark interest and keep the audience engaged in a storyline.[93] *Fauda,* like many action shows, relies on action and violence for audience engagement. Gunter et al argue in their book *Violence on Television: Distribution, Form, Context, and Themes* that most violence on TV is legitimized by motives and goals.[94] These legitimizations have an enormous influence on TV audience and their perception of the characters and storyline. George Gerbner believes that "television more than any other institution, molds American behavioural norms and values."[95] Keeping this in mind, I argue that the biggest difference in the portrayal of violent acts committed by the Israeli and the Palestinian characters in *Fauda* are the characters' motivations and the goals or, to put in in Gerber's words, their norms, and values.

To decipher this second field of the qualitative data analysis, several aspects must be taken into consideration. Firstly, the number of instances in which violence is used by the different characters is important to establish how threatening, and in the case of the members of the Israeli Defence Forces, how competent the characters are. The pursued goal, the motives, and immediate reasons for the acts of violence play a big role in their justification, whereas the kind of violence used can make a big difference to the show's audience perception of the characters. While most TV audiences are, for example, very familiar with shootings and accept them as "normal" part of an action show, forms of violence that include torture paint a completely different picture.[96]

To understand the web of codes, motifs, goals and consequences of violent behavior in *Fauda*, all acts of active violence in the show will be broken down. To do so the scenes containing violence were collected and the violent behavior was categorized in nine groups. (1) deadly shooting, (2) non-deadly shooting, considering all shots fired that hit a target but did not lead to death, (3) stabbing, (4) beating, defined as a sequence of hits with fists, feet, knees, or blunt objects, or a single hard hit with fists, feet, knees, or blunt objects but excluding open

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[93] Barrie Gunter, Jackie Harrison and Maggie Wykes, *Violence on Television: Distribution, Form, Context, and Themes*, (Mahwa, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003): 2ff.

[94] Gunter, Harrison, Wykes. *Violence*, (2003): 106.

[95] George Gerbner, „Cultural Indicators: The Case of Violence in Television Drama," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 388(1), (March 1970). George Gerbner, "Georg Gerbner's views on stereotyping see Media Portrayals of the Elderly: Hearings Before the Select Committee on Aging," House of Representatives, Los Angeles, California, *Comm. Pub*. No. 69-231, 26. March 1980 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1980).

[96] Gunter, Harrison, Wykes. *Violence*, (2003): 77ff.

palm hits, (5) non-threatening violence, including pushes, struggles, open palm hits, choke holds in non-life threatening circumstances, often between allies, friends and colleagues, (6) explosions with human victims, (7) torture, defined as the infliction of severe physical pain in pursuit of information, or the infliction of severe physical pain for the perpetrator's pleasure or amusement, in a situation in which the victim is not able to defend themselves or fight back, (8) decapitations, (9) other, including throwing of stones, and hitting a car with another. For this part of the thesis only active acts of physical violence explicitly depicted on screen will be considered. Cases of psychological and physical violence that take place "offscreen" will be considered at a later point.

Table 2.1. Acts of violence

Acts of Violence	Total	by Israelis	by Palestinians
Shooting, deadly	97	85	12
Shooting, non-deadly	11	5	6
Beating	18	12	6
Non-threatening Violence	24	15	9
Explosions	7	4	3
Torture	10	6	4
Stabbing	4	3	1
Decapitation	1	0	1
Other	2	0	2
Total	173	130	144

Secondly, the quantity and type of violence suffered by the characters is crucial. As Gerber shows in his 1970 study on violence in TV series, the heroes are often characterised by the disproportionately high quantity of violence they suffer, as the audience will naturally take the side of a person enduring a lot of violence.[97]

Mankekar's 1999 study on Indian television drama with a focus on Indian soap operas, especially dramas of heroes of war, ecxellently shows the production and reproduction of societal values in these very popular television programs. In it she uncovers the predominant narrative of "violence [and suffering] on behalf of the nation",[98] which describes the willingness to kill and die on behalf of the nation, coded as militaristic nationalism.[99] A concept that can be

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[97] Gerbner, „Cultural," 74ff.
[98] Mankekar, *Screening*, 260.
[99] Mankeker, *Screening*, 260

effortlessly applied to *Fauda*, as the theme of the martyrdom for the homeland is one that runs through the show on both sides, although portrayed in very different ways.

Table 2.2. Types of Violence

Acts of Violence	Total Victims	Israeli Victims	Palestinian Victims	Unknown
Shooting, deadly	97	3	92	2
Shooting, non-deadly	11	5	6	0
Beating	18	7	11	0
Non-threatening Violence	19	6	13	0
Explosions	16	6	10	0
Torture	10	3	7	0
Stabbing	4	1	3	0
Decapitation	1	1	0	0
Other	3	3	0	0
Total	179	35	142	2

Over the course of *Fauda*'s 3 seasons, a total of 36 episodes, 133 acts of violence can be observed of which 171 have a definite victim and perpetrator. Out of 179 victims, 35 were Israelis and 142 were Palestinians, 2 victims are of unknown nationality. Of the perpetrators, 130 were Israeli whereas 44 were Palestinian. On the first look, these numbers seem to suggest, that the Palestinians in the film are depicted to be more "peaceful" than their Israeli counterparts. Assuming the Israelis in the show to be "the good guys" and the Palestinians to be "the bad guys" these numbers differ from Gunter et al's research, showing that "good guys" are less violent on TV and "bad guys" kill more. In fact, out of 107 acts of violence with a deadly outcome, only 17 were committed by Palestinians ending in the death of 10 Palestinians, 10 Israelis and 2 victims of unknown nationality – only a small part of the total 110 victims of fatal attacks.

When it comes to the violence portrayed in *Fauda*, however, the interpretation is a little more complicated. As can be seen in Table 2.1. the Israeli characters in the show commit more violent acts then the Palestinian characters. Nevertheless, three differentiating factors must be considered. First, the violence used by the Israelis in the series is exclusively used by members of the Special Forces. The nature of their profession accounts and justifies many of their violent actions. Even when these actions were imprudent and impulsive, which could be said for a number of the deadly shootings committed by the Israeli characters, as well as for instances of beatings, the fact that they happened in the course of an IDF mission makes them seem justified

or deems them to be a necessary sacrifice. Second, the instances of violence are different. While the Israelis account for the vast majority of deadly shootings in the season, the Palestinians account for almost all of the explosions that proved deadly for victims, not concerned with the number of innocent people, Israelis or Palestinians, killed, as well as the one decapitation.

However, as Gunter et all stress, it is not the number of attacks that the audience's perception comes down to, but the motives and goals pursued by the acts.[100] The audience is inclined to understand violence used to defend personal or social values whereas violence used unnecessarily is frowned upon. Therefore, whether it is used in an impulsive matter, for example because of a personal insult or in the spur of the moment, or if it is thought-out, is important.[101] Gunter at al suggest a variety of categories of goals pursued by violence in television. The three most common, and most relevant to this research, are: (a) evil or destructive intent, (b) upholding the law, and (c) self-preservation. While upholding the law and self-preservation would legitimize the use of violence in the eyes of the audience, evil or destructive intent does not have the same effect. Hence, the question of the perception of the Palestinian and Israeli characters in *Fauda* are not only contingent on the number of violent acts portrayed but also the intent behind it. By far the biggest part of violent acts of the Israeli characters can be ascribed to upholding the law, simply through the nature of their occupations. *Fauda* is most definitely not a show that portrays the work of the IDF to be correct and unproblematic and shows a lot of illegitimate, unauthorized, and highly controversial operations. Nevertheless, the biggest part of the shown violence is portrayed to be in pursuit of the law, justice, or national safety and never has negative consequences for the Israeli characters. When it comes to the portrayal of Palestinian violence, however, I argue that the motive for violence portrayed is a question of coding and decoding. In the specific context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, destructive intent, and self-preservation as motives for violent actions could go hand in hand, the creators, producers, and writers of *Fauda* had the opportunity to portray the intent of Palestinian nuanced and in relation to the political context – showing that the line between terrorist and freedom fighter is thin – but they chose not to. *Fauda,* follows in the footsteps of many past shows. It portrays Palestinians as the stereotypes of bombing, power hungry terrorists.[102] *Fauda* never portrays the terrorism in the show to be in pursuit of a political cause for sovereignty neither does it acknowledge the need for political activism. Instead of portraying a fight against Israeli occupation *Fauda* creates the image of all Palestinians fighting against Israel and Israelis. While

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[100] Gunter, Harrison, Wykes. *Violence*, (2003): 109ff.
[101] Fiske, Hartley, *Reading Television*, 15. Gerbner, „Cultural," 74.
[102] Shaheen, "Hollywood," 26ff.

Israelis in the show account for more instances of torture, they always commit these acts in pursuit of information to save the Israeli population from terrorist attacks, preventing more violence, while the most gruesome scene of torture on the Palestinian side simply happens out of revenge, without greater societal benefit. In the first season for example, a Palestinian Doctor sews a bomb into a captured IDF member's abdomen, his wards later make him believe they took out his kidneys only to detonate him in front of his colleagues and family. Although he was originally captured in pursuit of information, the gruesome torture only begins after the perpetrators find out, he has no useful information. It becomes clear that this torture takes place purely out of revenge for one of the perpetrators brother, who was shot a few episodes prior.[103] While it is much easier to keep emotional distance from the victims of a shooting, a widely impersonal act of violence, or create understanding for torture in an effort to gain information crucial to save lives, it is much harder to do so with victims of torture for personal revenge or pleasure.[104] The Palestinian characters are driven by hate and desperation that pushes them to a new level of innovation in their brutality. Their only aim seems to be to kill as many Israelis as possible. However, the lengths the Palestinian characters go to, to inflict mental and physical pain, going as far as recruiting the characters with the highest standing in society for their cause, creates a new level of antipathy for them. The fact that they are successful in convincing a doctor to break her Hippocratic oath also relates back to the question of the Palestinian characters loyalty and morality, posed in the introduction of this chapter. In addition, the level of preparation that went into this form of torture eliminated any doubt about the perpetrator acting in the heat of the moment. The preparation it must have taken to get an operating table and surgical instruments to a terrorist hide-out differentiates this form of torture from others.

Not only do the Palestinian characters kill Israelis they also do not shy away from killing fellow Palestinians who are suspected of collaborating with the Israelis, who stand in the way of their missions or who are trying to start peace negotiations with Israeli authorities. Jack Shaheen gives two possible explanations for the stereotypical portrayal of Arabs and more specifically Palestinians; either the producers of *Fauda* believed their portrayal of Palestinians to be a realistic and justified depiction, or they pursue a political agenda.[105]

Lastly, it was considered if the consequences of the violent acts are shown to the audience. Gunter et al define consequences of violence as both physical and psychological, I will be concentrating mainly on the psychological consequences the portrayed violence has for

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[103] *Fauda.* Season 1, Episode1.
[104] Gerbner, „Cultural," 77.
[105] Shaheen, "Hollywood," 26ff.

victims and their loved ones, as well as the perpetrators. This includes the guilt, or lack thereof, the characters feel after committing a violent act, as well as the mourning of loved ones after a character's death or the process of recovery after injury. Characters that portray the feeling of guilt after using violence will automatically be seen as "better" characters, and in extreme cases even pitied for what they "had" to do. Seeing the consequences of one's use of violence, for example the mourning family of a victim, on the other hand will make the character perceived as "bad" as our empathy goes to the victims.[106] As seen in table 2.2, most victims of violence in *Fauda* were Palestinians. Some of the deceased died in tragic scenes and circumstances and had close relationships to other significant characters in the show. These circumstances offered aa array of opportunities to show the psychological consequences violence has on the victims or their loved ones, however this opportunity was not used. Only the Israeli characters are shown to mourn their losses for more than one episode and only the Israeli characters are shown to be influenced in their everyday lives by the loss of a loved one. While Israeli characters in the show get to crumble, breakdown, be angry, cry, fight, and be comforted over the course of several episodes, the only longtime effect the loss of a loved one seems to have on the Palestinians is the sudden urge to execute a terror attack in revenge. An example of this is when Bashar loses his cousin and instead of mourning, realizes that he is now suspected to be a collaborator. The only way out he sees is to kidnap two Israeli students to prove his loyalty to Hamas and the fight against Israel.[107] When a member of the IDF shot a young Palestinian on his wedding day his widow, Amal, and his family can be seen mourning in the very same episode. In the following episode however, Amal decides to become a suicide bomber.[108] Over the course of one episode Amal goes from a crying widow to a calm and collected terrorist. The audience never sees her confused or in despair. On the Israeli side however, mourning is a long and difficult process. The bereaved go through several stages of mourning. The very same member of the Special Forces who killed the young groom for example, mourns his girlfriend over the course of three episodes after she died in a suicide bombing. He can be seen angry, alone in his apartment, crying in his sister's arms, confrontational with his boss and colleagues and overall, not in a state to work.[109] Similarly, the series does not show Palestinian characters regretting acts of violence whereas Israeli character show regret, empathy, or shame about the violence in certain instances. While it is the Palestinians' goal to kill as many innocent Israelis as possible, the Israeli characters regret the killing of innocent Palestinians. When Avichay, a

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[106] Gerbner, „Cultural," 75.
[107] Fauda Season 3
[108] Fauda Season 1, Episode 1
[109] Fauda. Season 1, Episode 1-5.

member of the IDF, gets questioned about an incident of friendly fire, he cannot only remember every second of the incident in which he killed a fellow Israeli soldier, he is also able to recall every single innocent Palestinian he has killed. We can clearly see how guilty he feels about every single incident and how he is almost relieved when he gets punished for it with suspension. Similar behavior cannot be observed in the Palestinian characters. The audience therefore is introduced to empathetic, caring, and "moral" Israelis – but cold blooded Palestinians.

2.3 Women

The role of women in *Fauda* stands out for the differences in their portrayal. The creators and producers made an apparent effort to show a variety of different female characters. The most obvious differences between the characters in the show are based on gender, rather than nationality. However, as this subchapter will show, the differences between the female Palestinian and Israeli characters in the show cannot be disregarded. This part of the thesis is meant to give an overview over the portrayal of women in the show and analyse the show's use of imperial feminism to justify the occupation of Palestine.

Women have always played a big role in the justifications for occupations or imperialism.[110] However, in the last decade the narrative of "oppressed and helpless" women – especially in Muslim countries – had been rediscovered as a trend in politics.[111] As Ali puts it:

> ''gender inequality and/or the mistreatment and abuse of women in Muslim societies are utilized by politicians, commentators, and war hawks in the polemic of the clash of civilizations to provide quantifiable evidence that particular primitivisms are endemic to Muslim society, and especially so when Islam provides the basis for the law in a given society.''[112]

Just like "othering" an entire population, "othering" the female population of a country, culture, or religion serves to justify intervention and create a separation from the "tolerant, forward thinking, western countries" that stand for equality. Shaheen observes that an Arab

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[110] Deepa Kumar, „Race, ideology, and empire," *Dialect Anthropol*, 39 (2015): 127.

[111] Deepa Kumar, „Gender, Sexuality, and Empire: imperialist Feminism in Culture," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_WG5C5OIbI, last accessed: 04. January 2021.

[112] Isra Ali, „The Harem fantasy in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings," *Dialect Anthropol*, 39, (2015): 34.

woman's "mute on-screen non-behaviour and black-clothed costume serve to alienate [her] from her international sisters".[113]

Although de Fleur put it well when he said "television is a men's world"[114] – a circumstance that is only changing slowly and is even more so the case in dramas set in the Middle East - several scholars have taken on the task of analyzing the portrayal of Arab women in film and television. Most, if not all of them, concluded that Arab women on screen are portrayed in a one dimensional and stereotyped way.[115] Shaheen found five categories that Arab women in film are made to fit into, of which three are relevant in the analysis of *Fauda*. According to him, Arab women in a show are either portrayed to be "belly dancers", "bundles of black", or "bombers,"[116] suggesting that Arab women are portrayed to be objects of lust, faceless beings, or terrorists. Although a change in Arab women's behaviour can be observed throughout the last years, and the Arab women in *Fauda* are not "mute",[117] not much has changed in their portrayal. Especially in comparison to the Israeli women in the show, Arab women are standardized and reduced until they become little more than "bundles of Black".[118]

Lavie-Dinur and Karniel studied the portrayal of Arab-Israeli women on Israeli reality TV shows in 2013. About two decades after the publication of Shaheen's work *The TV Arab,* the two researchers found a change in the depiction of Arab women but were still able to narrow them down to three categories. The "authentic-ethnic" Arab woman who stands up for her beliefs. She addresses political issues, like the Arab-Israeli apartheid, but quickly gets reduced to her function as fighter for political justice and is not perceived as human anymore. The "violent" Arab woman is stronger and more aggressive than the Jewish-Israeli woman. She has no control over her emotions and actions and does not shy away from the use of force. This stereotype especially plays into narratives of racism and the inherent violent behaviour of "savages". An image that gets strengthened and reproduced by these reality TV shows. Lastly the "Arab mother" who is a failure, either because she fails to stand up to men in her family, always being shamed and talked over, or because she does not care enough for her children, putting her own feelings and goals above her family's.[119] The two researchers came to the conclusion that "otherness" in Arab women – strengthened and produced by television – is

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113 Shaheen, „Hollywood," 24.
114 DeFleur, „Occupational," 65.
115 Lavie-Dinur, Karniel, „National Identity," 52.
116 Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2003, 23ff.
117 Shaheen, *Reel*, 24.
118 Shaheen, *Reel*, 24. Kumar. 2015b.
119 Lavie-Dinur, Karniel, „National Identity," 59ff.

tolerated as long as it is limited and easy to digest.[120] This trait can be found in *Fauda*'s main female Palestinian character Shirin al-Abed, played by Laëtitia Eïdo. The young doctor loves her country, her family, and her job. However, in comparison to the other Palestinian characters she dresses in a "western" style, condemns terrorist actions and previously studied and lived in France. Furthermore, we do not see her praying or referring to God – another trait she has in common with the Israeli characters in the show.[121]

In the following chapter five categories of analysis and comparison will be considered: (a) the characters' professional occupations, (b) the characters' behaviour, comparing both female Palestinian and Israeli characters, as well as male and female characters, (c) the female characters' relationships to the men in the show, (d) their sexuality, and (e) the way they dress.

In contrast to the male Palestinian characters in the show, the females' occupations are the same. While we only ever see one character, Shirin al-Abed, work outside the home, we know that at least two other characters are students and therefore are getting an education outside the home. The rest of the 13 female, Palestinian characters either do not have a paid occupation or their jobs are simply not mentioned at all. On the Israeli side however, one can observe a merit of different professional occupations. Unsurprisingly for an action-show, we find a lot of women in military occupations in and outside the field. Other characters are barkeepers, social workers, students, housewives and characters with unknown occupations. The lack of Palestinian women in paid positions goes against the narrative of the "modern woman" working outside the home and the comparison to the Israeli side creates a clear differentiation.

In Kumar's talk on imperialist feminism, she makes the interesting observation that the way a woman's ideal behaviour is described greatly varies inside their own country and outside of it. While women inside their own countries are expected to "behave", be friendly, and submissive, rebellion, strength, and assertiveness are welcomed in other places. This concept works well in *Fauda*, especially considering the characters working in the military. While they are expected to be violent, strong warriors whenever inside the Palestinian territory, as soon as they are back on Israeli grounds they are belittled, looked down on, understood as objects of desire and never put on the same step as their male colleagues. They become the male characters' obedient love interests.[122]

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[120] Lavie-Dinur, Karniel, „National Identity," 58.
[121] For more see chapter 2.4 Religion.
[122] Kumar, "Gender."

In general, the behaviour of women in *Fauda* differs from their male counterparts. *Fauda* is a prime example of positive sexism. While all the differences between men and women in the show are supposed to contribute to a positive portrayal of women, they merely reinforce inherently sexist views on behaviour and personality. The women in the show – especially in the first two seasons – are made to act as the male characters' consciences, constantly questioning their behaviour toward "enemies," and disapproving of torture and illegal operations. In the first season, this difference is especially visible in Nurit's behaviour. Nurit is part of the main IDF Team in *Fauda* and can be assumed to have the same training and experience as her male counterparts. When she finally gets to go into the field with them, after a long discussion with her boss and lover, Nurit is nervous to execute simple operations, unsure about the IDF's methods and needs comforting by her male colleagues. The women in the show are also portrayed to be less impulsive. While they snap at men, they refrain from violent action whenever possible, and consider their actions beforehand. Furthermore, all the female characters are able to swallow their pride in order to help their mission, family, country, or friends – an ability none of the main male characters seem to have. The characters Nurit and Doron, both part of the undercover team, fight constantly. Nurit dislikes Doron for his disregard for the law and commands from their superiors as well as his ego trips. When a part of the team goes to Gaza and Doron puts a colleague in danger through his reckless behaviour and obsession with one of the Palestinian characters, Nurit drops everything and volunteers to drives to Gaza to save the team.[123]

The line between men's and women's behaviour is slightly blurred in season three with the introduction of new female characters. Hila, the head of operations in Gaza, does not seem to have a problem with lying in order to catch a terrorist she has been hunting down for years – even if that meant risking Israeli lives.[124] Dana, working in interrogations, accounts for one of the incidents of torture when she turns off the morphine for a victim of a car bomb.[125] Although these two women are portrayed to be different to the other women in the show, and more like the men, we still see them vulnerable and crying during operations.[126]

Female characters in the show do not only behave differently inside and outside their own countries and compared to the male characters in the show. The comparison between Israeli and Palestinian women exhibits clearly visible differences as well. While we observe

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[123]*Fauda.* Season 3, Episode 9.
[124] *Fauda.* Season 3, Episode 9.
[125] *Fauda*. Season 3, Episode 1.
[126] *Fauda.* Season 3, Episode 9.

Palestinian women surrounded by their families and their husbands, we seldom see them on their own. And although they are very capable of standing up for themselves, they are never shown simply enjoying themselves. Israeli women, however, are shown drinking, smoking, dancing, and simply having fun. This might have been a conscious decision by the producers not to portray Palestinian women to be "bad Muslims",[127] or to emphasize the lack of light-heartedness in an occupied country, but the audience also does not get to see an equivalent to the way Israeli women are shown to enjoy themselves.

Another difference in the depiction between Israeli and Palestinian women in *Fauda* is the portrayal, or lack of portrayal, of sexuality. While most of the female Israeli characters are shown to have sex, Palestinians are portrayed to be romantic but never sexual. The only Palestinian women shown to have sex is Shirin, and, as established above, she is an exceptional character in the show. Shirin falls in love and has intercourse with the show's lead character, Doron, several times throughout the first and second season of the show. However, only one time in the second season is it actually shown and not merely implied. In her sexual encounter with Doron, the main Israeli lead, Shirin embodies the Palestinian nation,[128] as Doron would want it to be. Modern, forward looking, unconfrontational, unreligious, and "western". When we hear Doron talk about his love for Palestine and how he only feels like himself when he is there, he could just as well be talking about Shirin. While the affair of an Israeli member of the IDF and a Palestinian doctor could be seen as a progressive break with taboos, Shirin's embodiment of Palestine only makes their affair more problematic. The clearly unbalanced power dynamic of a on Israeli member of the special forces falling in love with a Palestinian woman who depends on him for protection, is complicated enough in itself. [129]

Lastly, the female Israeli and Palestinian characters differ in their possibilities to self-determination. Although the majority of the female characters in the show are unhappy, the Israeli characters choose the positions they are in. They choose their level of involvement in the conflict by deciding on a profession in the military or by choosing to marry and divorce IDF agents. They get to remove themselves from their living situations, like Gali who divorced an IDF agent because she did not want to put up with the risks related to his profession, and Nurit who left the IDF when she realised the emotional toll her job took on her. The female Palestinian characters however get dragged into the conflict involuntarily and are not offered an option to remove themselves from it. The female Palestinian characters married to terrorists could, of

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[127] All Palestinian characters in *Fauda* are portrayed to be Muslim.
[128] Mankekar, "Screening," 260ff.
[129] Ribke, "Fauda," 1252.

course, get a divorce as well, however the societal pressure to support the fight for Palestine's freedom keeps them tied to their partners. Marwa, a young woman in season three is happily married to her partner. When her brother-in-law gets involved with the IS and takes Marwa's husband with him, Marwa finds herself in interrogation rooms and in the midst of street shootings. She clearly does not want to be involved in any of it.[130] Similarly, most of the female Palestinian characters get involved in the IDF's operations by being related or married to a terrorist. All female Palestinian characters in the show are also portrayed to be victims of the situation. They do not take part in the attacks or operations, but they are the ones the audience sees suffering when something goes wrong. The only way for them to leave is, as the show portrays, with the help of Israelis. Nasrin, the wife of the first season's villain, eventually leaves him when their children are dragged into the conflict. She can only do so with the help of an IDF agent "saving" her.[131]

One thing that all the women in *Fauda* have in common is the emotional threat they pose to the "heroes" of the show.[132] Mankekar's study on soap opera in India finds women and lovers in war dramas to be a distraction from the men's duties. Not giving in to the women's seduction is a sacrifice they need to make to prove their love and dedication to their country.[133] There are several constellations of this in *Fauda*. Colleagues being in love not able to do their jobs,[134] a boss that treats one of his employees differently than the others,[135] agents distracted and endangering missions because they are in love with the object of their investigations,[136] terrorists not following their leaders' orders in order to protect the women they love,[137] men giving away information in interrogations to protect their wives[138] and so on.

Related to this, the second commonality all women in the show have is that they do not get their individual storylines. Quite literally every storyline revolving around a woman is highly influenced by a male character in the show. The only time a woman makes her own decisions, completely independent from a male character, is when Amal, the young widow from season one, becomes a suicide bomber to revenge her husband's death. This is not to say that there are no other individual storylines but every major decision a female character makes is

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[130] *Fauda.* Season 2. Episodes 3-12.
[131] *Fauda.* Season 1. Episode 11-12.
[132] Mankekar, "Screening," 267.
[133] Mankekar, "Screening," 266.
[134] *Fauda.* Season 2-3. Nurit and Sagi.
[135] *Fauda.* Season 1. Episode 8. Nurit not fired.
[136] *Fauda*. Season 1-2. Doron and Shirin.
[137] *Fauda.* Season 1. Episodes 8-9. Walid and Abu Ahmed fight about Methods and Shirin.
[138] *Fauda.* Season 2. Episode 5.

either suggested, pushed, or furthered by a man. Only one female main or side character is not in a romantic relationship with, or closely related to, a more prominent male character.

Finally, the way the women in the show dress needs to be considered. Although the difference in dress between Israeli and Palestinian characters in *Fauda* does not just apply to the women, it is more extreme for them. Most male characters wear jeans and t-shirts, polo shirts, or shirts but there is a clear difference in quality and style. The Israelis' shirts are new and clean and more modern while the Palestinian characters' shirts are washed-out and old fashioned. When the Israeli characters go undercover, changing their shirts to older washed-out versions is very common. In general, most female Palestinian characters are shown in long traditional dress, at least outside their home, whereas the most common dress for female Israeli characters is jeans and t-shirts. The contrast of the younger Palestinians dress inside and outside the home clearly shows a need to adapt to *Fauda*'s version of Palestinian society in which women dress modestly and traditionally in public. The Israeli women however show different styles of dressing, casual and modern. This could imply that Israeli women are free to show their style and personality in public whereas Palestinian women must hide theirs. Furthermore, every female Palestinian character, with the exception of Shirin, wears a hijab outside the house. Shirin does not wear a hijab in *Fauda*'s first season when she newly returned from France and has an affair with an Israeli member of the IDF but starts covering her hair in the second season when she marries her cousin, a member of Hamas whom she married for protection, not for love. Her whole character undergoes huge changes from the first to the second season. The outspoken, fearless young woman becomes afraid and submissive in order to save her own life. The blunt and inelegant connection to the hijab reproduces stereotypes in the most obvious ways and directly connects the wearing of a headscarf to oppression.[139]

All in all, *Fauda* is quite clearly a misogynistic show, and the biggest behavioural differences are not those between Palestinian and Israeli women but those between men and women in the show. My central thesis is that just like the portrayal of Palestinians in the show, the portrayal of women in *Fauda* reflects the wider Israeli public's view on women rather than challenging it. However, in contrast to the Israeli women in the show, the Palestinian women are portrayed to be oppressed, if not by men, then by their culture and religion. This is made clear in the direct comparison to the Israeli women and their "western freedoms." The Palestinian women of the show are also standardized and pushed to the background even more

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[139] *Fauda.* Season 1-3.

so than the Israeli women to form one unitary background. Although they are all strong, outspoken women, they are always subordinate to men.

2.4 Religion

The theme of the different portrayals of religion within the two opposing sides of *Fauda* was one of the last themes I added to this thesis. This is because of a very simple reason: I had not noticed it earlier. This reveals my own bias when it comes to the portrayal of religions on television. I had not paid any attention to the portrayal of religiosity – or lack thereof. The explicit portrayal of Islam in *Fauda* did not surprise me at all – I expected it – yet I did not notice that Judaism was missing from the picture and that the religiosity of the Israeli characters in the show were not addressed. Maybe that was due to growing up atheist in a Jewish neighborhood of a Catholic country or maybe just due to the deeply internalized narrative of the "oriental" and especially the Islamic "other" that needed addressing. It took almost a whole season until it clicked for me: I saw mosques, Muslims praying, constant references to Allah and the Islamic afterlife, but it took a terrorist holding a gun to the head of a Jewish-Israeli member of the special forces, ordering him to pray, for me to realized that I had not seen a synagogue, Jewish prayer, a candelabra, references to kosher food, or Jewish religious clothing up to this point, the very last episode of season one. The question posed itself what was intended or implied with the different portrayals of Judaism and Islam in *Fauda*.

According to several scholars the absence of explicit depictions of Judaism in film and television is not uncommon,[140] it is notably absent from big and small screens around the globe. Change only started in the past few years with mainstream productions of television shows revolving around Judaism in a "realistic" rather than condescending way, like the productions of *Unorthodox* or *Shtisel*.[141] However, that does not mean that the audience is not familiar with a wide array of Jewish customs and symbols. Abrams argues that one must however make a "clear distinction between Jewishness as racial, ethnic, political and cultural identities, and Judaism as a religion and set of beliefs, behaviors, and values."[142] He refers to ethnic rather

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[140] Nathan Abrams, *The new Jew in film: exploring Jewishness and Judaism in contemporary cinema*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012): 135.
[141] Abrams, *The new Jew*, 158.
[142] Abrams, *The new Jew,* 134.

than religious markers like appearance or clothing.[143] Although both Talmon and Peleg[144] and a report published by the Guttman Archives note a reliquification of the Jewish-Israeli society[145] this trend is not displayed in *Fauda*.

Richard Bonney reflects on the line separating religion and culture in his article *Reflections on the Difference between Religion and Culture* asking if the two can be separated and if so where the one ends and the other begins.[146] He brings forward examples supporting his argument, that religion is responsible for far less societal differences than usually portrayed. He explains the localized aspect of culture and gives examples of how these aspects are expressed in evitable religious traditions. As one example he gives the different interpretations of Quran verses prescribing head coverings for women. In Afghanistan, he argues, the majority of women wear a burka, in neighboring Pakistan however most women wear a hijab and only a small part of the female population wears a burka. A phenomenon that has nothing to do with a difference in religion but rather one in culture.[147] By means of examples like this one,[148] he explains that although religion can serve as a base, source, or justification for cultural phenomena it is often not its root or only explanation.[149] Just like the construct of nationalism, religion serves as basis for societal norms and common culture, creating a feeling of belonging and binding people together.[150] The line between culture and religion lures or vanishes.

In Israel, the line between religion and culture is an especially thin one. The Guttman Archive has been collecting data on the religious identification of Jewish Israelis since 1990. According to its report a substantial part of the Jewish-Israeli population self-identifies as secular. Notably, the biggest part of the population still follows religious observances and supports religious values. More than 70% of the population consume kosher food, support circumcision, hold the sabbath to be a special day, and believe that god will reward "good" and punish "bad" behavior.[151] Ilan Troen, who's article is based on the statistics collected by the Guttman archive, argues that in the case of Israel, one must rethink the terms religious and

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[143] Abrams, *The new Jew,* 137.

[144] Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg (eds.), Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion, (Austin: University of Texas Press 2011), 3.

[145] Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinson, and Elihu Katz, *A Portrait of Israeli Jewry: Beliefs, Observances, and Values among Israeli Jews 2000*, Guttman Center of the Israeli Democracy Institute for the AVI CHAI Foundations (2002): 30ff.

[146] Richard Bonney, "Reflections on the Differences Between Religion and Culture," *Diversity in Medicine*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (2004): 25.

[147] Bonney, "Reflections," 26.

[148] Bonney, "Reflections," 26ff.

[149] Bonney, "Reflections," 29.

[150] Bonney, "Reflections," 31.

[151] Levy, Levinson, Katz, *A Portrait*, 38.

secular. While 46% of Israelis identify as secular, 80% state to believe in god.[152] The difference in identification strongly correlates with the studies' participant's level of education. Participants with low levels of education tend to identify as religious and traditional, participants with higher levels of education, especially those with an university degree, tend to identify as secular or secular and anti-religion.[153] Troen finds that religiosity is not measured in the belief in god but by the active participation in religious traditions. At the same time, he states that a lot of traditions and customs stemming from religion must, at this point, be considered culture rather than religion.[154]

The correlation of religiosity and education might offer an explanation for the lack of religious symbols and acts portrayed by the Jewish-Israeli characters in *Fauda*. Another explanation might be the Zionist-Secular tradition in Israel. Although the Jewish-Israeli characters' political opinion is not thematized, the assumption of a secular-Zionist stance is not too farfetched.

Although Troen and other scholars highlight the singularity of the blurring of religion and culture in Israel, I argue that the same could be applied to Palestine. A lot of the religiosity portrayed in *Fauda* come down to everyday behavioral patterns like dress and speech – aspects that would not significantly change with a character's religiosity. In contrast to the Islamic identity of the Palestinian characters, who are all of Islamic faith, *Fauda* never touches on the Jewishness of the Israeli characters, who are all Jewish with only one exception.[155] The Islamic faith is therefore singled out in *Fauda*, which is problematic as the show creates a close relation between Islamic traditions and terrorist attacks without ever addressing the political incentive of these attacks. Religion is instrumentalized to distract from the political problems that form the root of the conflict. *Fauda* (re-)creates an image of fanatic Islamism – a popular concept of the enemy – instead of that of a political agenda. Religion is purposely highlighted on one side of the conflict and covered up on the other to create an even bigger more prominent divide between the two opposing sides in *Fauda*, playing into the popular stereotypical portrayal of Arabs as "fanatic bombers".[156] The show thereby finds an easy way to collect international sympathies and to evade Israel's responsibility and role in the conflict. Instead of fighting political aspirations for freedom and independence, the IDF is portrayed to fight extreme

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[152] Levy, Levinson, Katz, *A Portrait*.
[153] Levy, Levinson, Katz, *A Portrait*, 35.
[154] Ilan Troen, "Secular Judaism in Israel," *SOC*, 53, (2016): 154.
[155] A Druze character joining the IDF team in the last two episodes of season 3.
[156] Shaheen, *Reel*, 20ff.

political Islam and terrorism. It strengthens and reproduces an image of radical Islam, not just using a concept of an enemy understood by its audience but instrumentalized to justify military involvement in other countries worldwide such as the US war on Terror, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[157]

Leaving Judaism unaddressed implies that it is the "norm", or "default". The focus on the portrayal of the Islam contributes to the "othering" of the Palestinian characters and creates an even bigger divide between the different sides in *Fauda*. Political Islam has played a significant role in the justification for invasion and occupation of predominantly Muslim countries. *Fauda* embraces this very narrative, explaining terrorist attacks against Israel with Islam. At the same time the show conveys a one-sided image of religion in Israel and Palestine by leaving Judaism widely unaddressed but constantly depicting Islam. Islam, in this way is depicted as the main reason for the Arab-Israeli conflict, rather than politics.

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[157] Tom Rockmore, "On the So-Called War on Terrorism," *METAPHILOSOPHY*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (April 2004)

3. The Impact of a Television Show

This chapter is dedicated to the perception and influence of *Fauda*. It questions how its audience encounters, interprets, thinks and talks about the show.[158] I will analyze the reviews of *Fauda* published in print or online news outlets, including the *New York Times*, *The Time*, *Haaretz*, *Jadaliyya*, *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and the English website of *al-Jazeera*. In addition, Nahuel Ribkes' article *Fauda television series and the turning of asymmetrical conflict into television entertainment*[159] will be consulted for information on critiques published in Hebrew in Israeli newspapers. The analysis of audience reviews on the movie and television critique website IMDB, as well as reviews on the social media platform Twitter, constitute the second and third part of this analysis. As internationally used websites, both provide the possibility to reveal a wide range of opinions and international influence and reception of the show. Concretely, the para-textual analysis focuses on how *Fauda* is received, if the authors of the articles, critiques, and reviews reflect on the political setting of the show, if they indicate change or confirmation in their beliefs and opinions on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Several studies on the influence of television series on its audience and nationalism have been conducted throughout the past decades. However, this study is new as it concerns itself with a show that is available in 190 countries worldwide due to its distribution by Netflix. As more and more series and films are distributed via and produced by online platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu, the national television market gets replaced by an international one. Shows distributed in this international manner face the new challenge to appeal to a much broader audience and raise the question of how culturally specific meanings translate to an international audience and mix with local meaning systems.[160]

Lila Abu-Lughod and Purnima Mankekar have argued that television is a key institution in creating national sentiment[161] and the image of the "good citizen".[162] Mass media attempts to assimilate citizen to a national norm or optimum.[163] Playing into the audiences' emotions and moral concepts, Mankekar states, soap operas draw the biggest possible audiences and keep them engaged by addressing their "passions, fears, resentment, and aspirations".[164] In Israel,

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[158] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 21ff.
[159] Ribke, "Fauda."
[160] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 45.
[161] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 9.
[162] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 12.
[163] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 5.
[164] Mankekar, *Screening*, 7.

evening news and journalism take that place of soap operas drawing enormous audiences,[165] and function as the main carrier for nationalism and Zionist ideology.[166] I argue that *Fauda* combines the emotionally engaging aspects of a soap opera, the suspense of an action show, and the realistic styling that reminds its audience of the evening news. In contrast to a soap opera, *Fauda* does not rely on dramatic romance and unexpected twists. It creates the same kind of involvement by portraying a fictional version of an omnipresent conflict. The show therefore draws on its audience's hopes and fears while connecting it to a small number of very personal, fictional stories creating a certain distance to the harsh reality its audience lives in. Although a series' message can get deflected by different experiences and everyday realities,[167] *Fauda* found a way to speak to an international audience. Working off an almost universal fear of radical and political Islam, fed and furthered by populism and mass media around the globe, *Fauda* speaks to a wider, international audience. Employing a concept of morality[168] that justifies the defense of democracy at any price, which has been distributed[169] to most corners of the world, *Fauda* not only reproduces a part of the Israeli population's conception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict[170] but shapes the international conception of the very same. Its understated styling and slightly more differentiated portrayal of Arabs leads to confusion about its accuracy at times.[171]

Nahuel Ribke on the other hand, suggests the audience is interested in the show for its action scenes rather than the conflict or politics.[172] This imlies just how "normalized" the occupation and the conflict is in Israel and the world. The show's creators also commented that they were hesitant to make a show about such a much-discussed conflict because they were afraid the audience would not be interested in the conflict's politics. "People don't want to hear about Palestinians" Issacharoff said in one interview.[173] Although the large number of audience's reviews not engaging with the political context of the show might suggest that he is right, one should not dismiss the large number of comments addressing the political context, implying they learned something new about it. An interesting subject for further research would

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165 Munk, "Fauda," 488. Peri, *Telepopulism*, 3.
166 Peri, *Telepopulism*, 2.
167 Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 33.
168 Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 100.
169 Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, X.
170 Ribke, "Fauda," 1247.
171 Munk, "Fauda," 487.
172 Ribke, "Fauda," 1250.
173 David M. Halbfinger, "'Fauda, an Israeli TV Hit, Lets Viewers Escape – Into the Conflict," New York Times, 22. May 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/arts/television/fauda-an-israeli-tv-hit-lets-viewers-escape-into-the-conflict.html.

be to investigate if the audience is influenced by the show and the images it distributes to a higher or lower degree depending on their interest in its political context. I argue that the stereotypical portrayal of Palestinians and one-sided representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in *Fauda* go less noticed because they are well packaged in shallow action scenes but also because *Fauda*'s audience is desensitized to human rights violations directed towards "terrorists". Judging from the reviews of *Fauda* a large part of its audience lives in Europe, the US, India and of course Israel. The threat of terrorism is a popular political narrative in all of these countries and harsh, even unlawful, courses of actions against "terrorism" are welcomed by the wider public. The racial stereotyping that goes hand in hand with this narrative does not seem to upset *Fauda*'s audience or maybe even for the wider public in the above-mentioned countries. A baselevel agreement with the portrayed stereotypes in combination with a packaging in the form of an action show leads the audience not to feel compelled to question the portrayed stereotypes, which are reinforced in the show. If *Fauda* would claim to be closer to reality, the audience might reflect on and question the images shown in the show more and be less vulnerable to its impact on their views. If *Fauda* was less realistic in its styling and did not claim any connection to reality, its audience might not take the stereotypical portrayal of Palestinians at face value. Instead, the show's producers and creators try to walk the middle line. The realistic styling combined with the claim to be heavily influenced by Raz's experience as undercover agent and Issacharoff's experience as journalist mean that the audience is led to believe *Fauda* is a close-to-real portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Fauda*, Ribke claims, negotiates Palestinian and Israeli identity on television.[174] The show ends up presenting the "good" Israelis as urban and modern whilst portraying the "evil" Palestinian terrorists as rural and backward. A pattern Abu-Lughod descried in her study on Egyptian soap operas, in which urban middleclass writers try to portray rural poor characters.[175] She raises the question who can or should write which characters. In the context of *Fauda* the audience should be aware of the dubiety of Israeli writers, writing Palestinian characters.[176]

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[174] Ribke, "Fauda," 1246.
[175] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 111.
[176] Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*, 13.

3.1 Newspaper Articles

During my analysis, it became clear the reviews and critiques published in official news outlets differed greatly from the audience reviews published on IMDB and Twitter. The articles published in newspapers for one reflect a lot more on the political context of the show. But even though most of the authors are aware and reflective of the stereotypical portrayal of Palestinians and the one-sided portrayal of the conflict in the show, the majority ignore its setting and emphasise its entertainment aspect, calling to leave politics aside and instead commenting on the show's style, script, and casting.[177] Many articles simply praise its international success.[178]

On the other side of the spectrum authors take *Fauda* as starting point for a political discussion, and impulse to get the Arab-Israeli conflict back on the international readership's mind. Usually, the same authors condemn the show for its justification of human rights violations and negative portrayal of Palestinians.[179] Although, some reflect on the show painting a rather neutral and balanced picture or even praise the show for its big contribution to a more nuanced portrayal of Arabs on TV.[180]

Although the reactions in newspapers are quite diverse, reviews of the show criticizing the portrayal of the IDF in the show are missing.[181]

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[177] Hugo Rifkid, "Fauda television series and the turning of a asymmetrical conflict into television entertainment," Media, Culture & Society, Vol. 41(8), (2019). Mounia Meiborg, "Die Arabisierten," Zeit Online, 29. May 2018, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2018-05/fauda-netflix-serie-israel-netflix-militaer?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.

[178] Haaretz, "'Fauda' Is Coming to Netflix: What You Need to Know Ahead of Season 2," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 22. May 2018. Haaretz, "Hit Israeli Show 'Fauda' Set for Indian Remake Tuned to Conflict with Pakistan," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 7. November 2019.

[179] Sayed Kashua, "'Fauda' Creators Think Arabs Are Stupid," *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, 12. January 2018. Majed Abusalama, "From Fauda to the Messiah: The "Us – Them" Narrative – A Netflix Disorder," Jadaliyya, 2. April 2020, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40898. Linah Alsaafin, "Musta'ribeen, Israel's agents who pose as Palestinians," Jadaliyya, 10. April 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2018/4/10/mustaribeen-israels-agents-who-pose-as-palestinians. Tarek Fatah, "Love of Palestinians vs. respect for Israel," Toronto Sun, 22. April 2020, https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/fatah-love-of-palestinians-vs-respect-for-israel.

[180] Withworth, "Damian." Rachel Shabi, "The next Homeland? The problems with Fauda, Israel's brutal TV hit," The Guardian, 23. May 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/may/23/the-next-homeland-problems-with-fauda-israel-brutal-tv-hit.

[181] This might be due to the journalist's deeper engagement with the materials compared to "regular" audience members or due to a lack of knowledge of languages other than English, German, French and Arabic that prohibit me from understanding a substantial number of reviews written about the show in other languages.

3.2 IMDB

Compared to the officially published reviews, the personal reviews from users of the film review platform IMDB are much less reflective of the political context of the show. *Fauda* reached 8.2 stars out of 10, rated by 20,035 users.[182] More than 77% gave the show an 8-star review or higher.[183] Most of the remaining reviews were very low. This could either be due to the polarizing nature of the show or simply because few people will review a show they found, simply put, "okay."

279 users gave *Fauda* written reviews out of which 88 were negative, 174 were positive, and 17 were neutral.[184] Authors of neutral comments were either unhappy with the last season but enjoyed the first two, or recognized *Fauda*'s problematic portrayal of Palestinians but still enjoyed the show, and therefore gave a neutral review. Authors of positive and negative reviews mostly portrayed very firmly established opinions about the show and its political background. In fact, most reviews that exceeded a short "great show", referred to the show's political context in one way or another. Although some negative comments were related to bad camera quality, or poor writing, the overwhelming majority of negative comments referred to the unfair portrayal of Palestinians in the show. However, a few users complained about an unfair representation of the IDF, calling the show antisemitic and accusing it of shaming the Israeli army. All in all, the users that left negative comments portrayed a set of firmly established opinions. None of them implied a change in their take on the conflict or a lack of knowledge about the very same. The positive reviews on the other hand were far more varied. Most of the positive reviews referred to the show as "balanced", "authentic", and "realistic" however the latter two could refer to the show's styling just as much as its content. A lot of users who left positive reviews justified those reviews by stating their authority on the matter, outing themselves as Israelis, former or active soldiers, having experience with Israel, or as Middle Eastern Studies students. Only a handful of users indicated a change of opinion on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and these changes were in favor of the Palestinians, which raises the question what the respective users thought about Palestinians before watching the show and why. None of the authors of positive reviews stated a close relation to Palestine or Palestinians. And, most relevant for this thesis, some of the users implied to have learned about the Arab-Israeli conflict

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[182] Of which 13,504 stated their gender. 11.191 indicated to be men and 2.313 indicated to be women. Other genders cannot be indicated on the platform.
[183] As of 11.4.2021
[184] As of 11.4.2021.

through the show. These users either referred to the realistic feel of the show or to the other users claiming authority on the matter. For example, a user named trash-4108420 stated "As a student of Middle Eastern politics, this is an ultra-realistic portrayal of attitudes and interests which perpetuate the sorry state of affairs.".[185] User tidealum claimed the show "shows true Islamic values and behaviour"[186] in an IMDB review. Other users claimed to have learned about Israeli and Arab culture, Islam, Hebrew, and Arabic. None of them reflected on who they had learned this perceived new knowledge from. Pulkit Malhotra posted on Twitter "I felt so ignorant to the Israeli-Palestine conflict, before this show".[187] And Tara-Salem posted in IMDB the show "made me realize how Hebrew and Arabic languages sometimes shared common words, curses, food and culture".[188]

3.3 Twitter

The analysis of tweets about *Fauda* was slightly more complicated. It was impossible to review all tweets with the hashtag Fauda, FaudaOfficial, FaudaonNetflix, NetflixFauda, or FaudaNetflix. Instead, I opted to look into the trending tweets containing one of the above-mentioned hashtags, on a regular basis between February and April 2021. In this way I hoped to gain an insight into the general discussion about the show on Twitter. In addition, I took a closer look at Raz's and Issacharoff's Twitter profiles, focusing on the tweets they had responded to, assuming that more people would have seen these tweets. Lastly, I looked into the tweets with the most engagement. Filtering out any tweets containing the hashtags mentioned above that had less than 10 responses. Out of all these tweets I chose the ones that stirred up discussions, implied change in the user's opinion on the conflict, the users implying that his, her, or their opinion had been supported by the show, for further analysis. Most tweets however were recommendations to watch the show, sometimes as replies to another user asking for new show recommendations and sometimes unsolicited. Some users wrote longer reviews of the show, and a number of journalists posted their articles about the show on twitter and

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[185] trash-4108420, "User Reviews," IMDB, 20. October 2019, last accessed 11. April 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4565380/reviews?ref_=tt_ql_3.

[186] Tidealum, "User Reviews," IMDB, 21. October 2021, last accessed 11. April 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4565380/reviews?ref_=tt_ql_3.

[187] Pulkit Malhotra, 10. May 2020. See: Appendix 6.1.

[188] Tara-Salem, "User Reviews," IMDB, 25. April 202o, last accessed 11. April 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4565380/reviews?ref_=tt_ql_3.

opened up a discussion about the articles and the show on their feed. All these articles were considered in the analysis of the articles as mentioned above. Unsurprisingly, the comments about and reviews of *Fauda* were a lot more contentious on Twitter than they were on IMDB. The users' option to engage with other users' tweets opened up the space for discussion as well as fights. Users also articulated stronger opinions than in the other two categories of analysis. Many tweets portrayed an author's outrage. More than the other two mediums, Twitter users were upset about the misrepresentation of the IDF, accusing *Fauda* of antisemitsm and extreme leftism. On the other end of the political spectrum, Twitter users called out the justification of human rights violations in the show. Many users engaged with the political and historical background of *Fauda* and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Just like it was the case on IMDB, many users implied that they had learned about the Israel-Palestine conflict from *Fauda* or stated that they found it to feel very realistic but did not know about the conflict or the region. More so than on IMDB, users made false claims about the show and confused season, places, and characters in their description. Noticeably, many users commenting on *Fauda* on Twitter were Indian, implied to be Indian or to be of Indian descent by including the Indian flag in their bio or stating that they were in fact from India, where *Fauda* seems to have an exceptionally large following.[189] These users usually supported the show and called for an Indian version of the very same[190] – which has been confirmed to be in the making.[191]

3.4 Conclusion

The para-textual analysis shows that *Fauda* only has very limited influence on the opinions of people with well-established prior beliefs in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, viewers who make a first contact with the conflict through the show are inclined to believe the portrayal of the conflict, and therefore the portrayal of Palestinians in *Fauda* to be accurate and real. It also shows that most people who reflect on the show and find its portrayal to be one-sided are not concerned by that fact but brush it off as a side effect of an action show. There needs to be a villain and in this setting it is the Palestinians. *Fauda* reaches a wide audience by speaking to the current climate of fear of political and radical Islam and related terror attacks.

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[189] Unfortunately, Netflix does not publish its viewing statistics.
[190] The support for *Fauda* seems to align with the populist and fascist turn Indian politics have taken under the leadership of President Narendra Modi. The Indian remake of the show will follow an undercover team fighting terrorism in Pakistan and aligns with the Islamophobic sentiment in the country.
[191] Haaretz. 2019.

In combination with a distribution via Netflix, the largest online streaming platform, *Fauda* reaches a large audience that is not overly familiar with its context. Although we can assume that the show will not change anyone's set believes, I argue that it, and other shows of its kind, have a significant influence on a less informed and less prejudiced audience. Within Israel, *Fauda* seems to simply reproduce the majority's image of the conflict by finding a middle ground between left and right. The show caters to fans and opponents of the IDF.

4. Conclusion

This thesis determined the influence of the television show *Fauda* by analyzing its audience's and critic's reactions, reviews, and critiques. I argue that the show reproduces the stereotype of the Palestinian as a terrorist by portraying differences in its Israeli and Palestinian characters' professional occupations, their use of violence, the role of women, religion and loyalty.

Although *Fauda* portrays a number of Palestinian characters in highly prestigious occupations – a circumstance that could make them trusted characters who reflect back positively on the image of Palestinians in general - the show undoes this potential positive impact by revealing that every such character cooperates with or even leads terrorist organizations and missuses his or her power and influence. While the portrayal of Palestinians in such positions could have weakened the claim for the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by portraying well educated, competent and reliable characters, the depiction of these very same characters as corrupt and dangerous villains strengthens and justifies the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The biggest difference in the portrayal of the use of violence on the opposing sides in *Fauda* is the intended aims of the particular act of violence. While the Israeli characters are portrayed to use violence to save and protect the Israeli as well as Palestinian civil populations, the Palestinian characters are portrayed to use force to inflict as much pain as possible to the Israeli characters and the wider Israeli population. The use of violence is never shown to be in pursuit of a political agenda but rather, out of pure bloodthirst and revenge. While the Israeli characters in the show use "conventional" – even though often illegal – methods of violence such as shootings or beating subject in interrogation, the Palestinian characters account for most of the really shocking, gruesome acts of violence, especially in their methods of torture. The preparation and thought that must have gone into their torture methods also make them even more dangerous and calculating. The Palestinians are shown to be the threat to Israelis as individuals and to Israel as a state.

In the portrayal of the female characters, *Fauda* instrumentalizes the characters to support the claim for the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian women are portrayed to be victims of their families and terrorist organizations. Even though they are portrayed as headstrong women who are not afraid to speak up, they get stuck in a conflict they seemingly have little to do with. In contrast to the female Israeli characters of the show, the

Palestinian characters did not choose the position they are in and have virtually no way out. *Fauda* employs imperial feminism to justify drastic measures Israeli soldiers use to "protect" Palestinian women from their families, culture, or religion – even when it is against their will. The Palestinian women - always related to the terrorists but never directly involved in their attacks and plans - often suffer heavy consequences and get offered deals by the IDF to give up information either for a possibility to leave the country and situation they are portrayed to be in involuntarily or get scared into cooperating with the Israeli authorities.

The unequal portrayal of religion in *Fauda* made for another interesting aspect in the analysis of the show. The audience gets confronted with a lot of images depicting Islam, but the depiction of Judaism on the other hand is widely absent. Not only is there an unequal portrayal of both religions, but Islam is also instrumentalized as a scapegoat for the terrorists' reasons for attacks. Religion, and not politics, is portrayed to be the motivation behind any terror acts in the show. This creates an easy way out for the Israeli side in the show. Instead of being confronted with their responsibility and involvement in a political conflict, putting the terror attack solely on religious fanaticism rids Israel and Israelis of any responsibility and accountability.

Lastly, the difference in the portrayal of loyalty amongst the Israeli characters in contrast to the depicted loyalty amongst the Palestinian ones has the potential to strongly influence the audience's sympathies for the different sides of the conflict. Furthermore, it weakens the Palestinian cause. Instead of showing political movements with similar goals, it fragments the Palestinian side and portrays struggles between the different Palestinian groups as a mob war or only as an internal fight for power. Lastly, the lack of loyalty discredits Palestinians as reliable partners in peace and therefore supports the status quo as it makes a peaceful, political solution seem impossible.

While the influence television has on its audience, and the part it plays in the distribution of nationalism and as well as national values has been researched,[192] *Fauda* is part of a new generation of series and television shows being distributed worldwide. A wider distribution of the show goes hand in hand with a bigger potential for influence. At the same time, the international distribution of film and series pose new challenges for taking the different political and societal contexts in the creation and decoding of the shows into consideration.

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[192] Mankekar, *Screening*. Abu-Lughod, *Dramas*.

This thesis argued that the image of Palestinians portrayed in *Fauda* in general corresponds with the wider Israeli perception of Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Similar to a soap opera, it draws on its audience's emotional involvement with the show's material. Instead of an engaging romantic plot however, *Fauda* draws on its audience's fears, confronting them with a conflict that is quite literally "close to home". Its image and narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict is transported to a wider international audience, well packaged in an action show. *Fauda*'s "realistic" styling helps sell its depiction of Palestinians and the conflict as the "truth". This styling makes a differentiation between reality and fiction difficult for *Fauda*'s audience.[193] Hence, *Fauda* becomes an internationally available and easily accessible source of information about the conflict.

The praise *Fauda* received for its "humane" and well-rounded portrayal of Palestinians, I argue, stems from a comparison to earlier Israeli productions which simply show Palestinians as terrorists, giving them no screen time and showing no character development or personal backstory. This, however, does not change the stereotypical and orientalist portrayal of Palestinians in the show. The real innovation in *Fauda* is not the change in the portrayal of Palestinians but the portrayal of the IDF. As criticizing the IDF was and is taboo in Israel, *Fauda* took a big step in portraying the illegal and impulsive actions of members of the IDF that had no professional consequences for the characters. This new portrayal however gets attenuated by the success all the portrayed violations of the law and human rights have in fighting terrorism and protecting the civilian population.

While orientalist and stereotypical portrayal of Palestinians, and Arabs in general, is nothing new, I argue that *Fauda*'s international success gives it an immense influence over the international perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Fauda*'s influence has been proven within Israel, in visibly boosting conscription numbers to the IDF's undercover units.[194] A clear sign that *Fauda* resonates positively with its Israeli audience. By analyzing international reactions to the show on Twitter, IMDB and in newspaper articles one can note the widely positive perception of *Fauda* as a show which portrays a democracy's fight against terrorism. The analysis reveals that especially parts of the show's audience without much prior knowledge of the conflict are inclined to take *Fauda*'s messages at face value.

To conclude, *Fauda* falls in line with many action shows that portray Arabs in a stereotypical and orientalist way. *Fauda*'s uniquely realistic styling, international distribution,

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[193] Peri, *Telepopulism*, 10.
[194] Ribke, "Fauda," 1250.

and success, however, heighten its influence on an international audience and give the show the potential to change its audience's perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict, justifying Israeli occupation over Palestinian territories.

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6. Appendix

6.1 Screenshots of discussed Tweets

Enemy Slayer @EnemySlayer24_7 · Apr 2

Fauda is highly underrated as web series, one of the best show on Netflix. Must Watch 👌👌

💬 16   🔁 23   ♡ 200   ⬆️

Adan Anwar @AdanAnwar15 · 23h

Watching **Fauda** makes me want to travel to Israel so damn much

💬   🔁   ♡ 2   ⬆️

.inzozinziza. @nzizagilbert44 · Apr 4

Have you watched **Fauda**??😂😂

> 🦊 **MAiSHA**🦋✨ @LynMaisha · Apr 3
> Just watched two episodes of peaky Blinders naye nafunye dda lung cancer

💬   🔁   ♡ 1   ⬆️

Ishkaran Singh Bhandari @ishkarnBHAN... · Mar 31

Replying to @ishkarnBHANDARI

How do people find OTT platforms addictive.....can't find one interesting series I want to binge watch!

💬 266   🔁 48   ♡ 915   ⬆️

Shashwat Srivastava @shasha_vns · Mar 31

Try **Fauda** on Netflix. It's an Israeli series. Very Good

💬   🔁   ♡ 3   ⬆️

Greg Grant @gregmgrant · Apr 2

Wow. Season 3 of **Fauda** got really silly.

💬   ⇄   ♡   ⬆

Michael A. Gayed, CFA ✔ @leadlagreport · Apr 4

Already binge watched through 3 **Fauda** episodes.

💬 7   ⇄ 3   ♡ 24   ⬆

GiselaH @Gisela_71 · Mar 30

Replying to @mariaescaja

Mozart in the jungle, unbelievable, marvelous mrs maisel, fleabag, **fauda**

💬   ⇄   ♡ 1   ⬆

Ashish @ash_ghosh2 · Apr 1

Replying to @ishkarnBHANDARI

Bhai, please try Israeli TV series '**FAUDA**' on Netflix

💬   ⇄   ♡   ⬆

susant parida @ib4uanytime · Apr 3

Replying to @daeroplate_v2

With so pretty girls,no doubt they're so good at espionage and honey traps

💬 1   ⇄   ♡   ⬆

dharmic aeroplate v2 @daeroplate_v2 · Apr 4

I think **fauda** was about a shin bet (shabak) unit :)

Ɛ @emremenekse83 · May 2, 2020

Sürükleyici israil yapımı bir dizi. İzlerken sıkılmıyorsunuz. Filistin İsrail çatışmasını konu alıyor. 1. Sezon oldukça taraflı. Bende İsrail sempatizanlığı yüksek algısı uyandırdı. Tavsiye ederim. #Fauda **#netflixfauda** #netflix
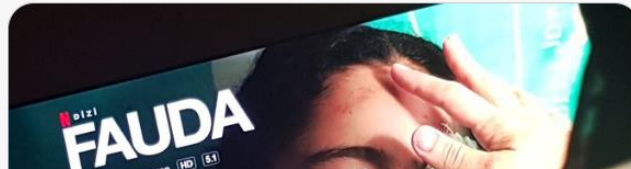
Dr. Yara Hawari د. يارا هواري @yara... · Dec 31, 2020 ···

1/4 The @ICRC_ilot went through @FaudaOfficial episodes & noted various violations of int. humanitarian law. Israelis responded mockingly pointing to other tv show fictional violations. @issacharoff the show's creator chimed in promising to come up with new "original violations".

💬 4 🔁 39 ♡ 75 ⬆

Dr. Yara Hawari د. يارا هواري @yara... · Dec 31, 2020 ···

Replying to @lioraz and @issacharoff

It seems there's a language barrier. Your show is trash, racist and whitewashes ethnic cleansing & war crimes. Nothing original about a bunch of white dudes doing that. Cheers.

💬 5 🔁 ♡ 6 ⬆

lior raz ✔ @lioraz · Jan 1 ···

Peace and love

💬 1 🔁 ♡ 5 ⬆

.com/lioraz/with_replies

Dr. Yara Hawari د. يارا هواري @yara... · Dec 31, 2020 ···

Replying to @yarahawari

2/4 The reason @ICRC_ilot noted these violations is because Israel is actually guilty of them in real life. In particular they highlight the act of "perfidy" in other words pretending to be a civilian or humanitarian in order to conduct a military operation. Fauda glorifies this.

💬 1 🔁 6 ♡ 34 ⬆

Dr. Yara Hawari د. يارا هواري @yara... · Dec 31, 2020 ···

3/4 The show also actively demonises Palestinians, portraying them as inherently violent & ignoble Arabs. There's nothing surprising about this. Arabs in general have long been depicted as such. And so Fauda falls into the same category of rather boring & conventional orientalism

💬 1 🔁 8 ♡ 36 ⬆

Dr. Yara Hawari د. يارا هواري @yara... · Dec 31, 2020 ···

4/4 It is also not surprising, albeit pretty sick & twisted, that @issacharoff promised to come up with new "original violations". Rest assured he won't have to look far for them, a simple glance outside his window will do.

💬 2 🔁 6 ♡ 36 ⬆

ICRC in Israel & OT ✔ @ICRC_ilot · Dec 27, 2020 ···

Ep. 7:
👍 Escorting a loved one to a hospital is fine.
❌ Building a military base in the premises of a hospital is not allowed by #IHL as it puts civilians and wounded fighters at risk.

💬 23   🔁 23   ♡ 72   ⬆️

ICRC in Israel & OT ✔ @ICRC_ilot · Dec 27, 2020 ···

Ep. 10:
👍 Cruising with friends in a van is a great way to enjoy the weekend.
❌ Using an ambulance for covert activities and impersonating health care workers and misusing the emblem are serious violations of IHL.

ICRC in Israel & OT ✔ @ICRC_ilot · Dec 27, 2020

Ep. 10:
❌❌Torture is illegal in any circumstances!❌❌

GIF

💬 30   🔁 25   ♡ 71   ⬆️

Majed Abusalama @MajedAbusalama · Dec 28, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot and @FaudaOfficial

Read my article which gives long investigation of #Fauda and the #Netflix disorder.

From Fauda to the Messiah: The "Us-Them" Narrative – A Netflix Disor…

ICRC in Israel & OT @ICRC_ilot · Dec 29, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot

We see that our attempt to make #IHL more accessible was not perceived as intended. The tweets were not meant to upset anyone.
Our goal was to use a fictional show that is popular internationally to raise awareness and generate a discussion about the importance of #IHL.

◯ 42   ⇄ 8   ♡ 23   ⬆

MOT @nachal_giyus86 · Dec 27, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot and @FaudaOfficial

For 50 years, the International Red Cross has refused to admit Israel's MDA even though it meets all other criteria for membership, on the grounds that it does not use one of the approved symbols. The Israeli society has used the Star of David, the Magen David, since the 1930s.

◯ 4   ⇄ 9   ♡ 104   ⬆

(((PatrickMtz))) @MtzPatrick · Dec 27, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot and @FaudaOfficial

@tweet_stamp stamp please

◯ 1   ⇄   ♡   ⬆

avi issacharoff @issacharoff · Dec 27, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot and @FaudaOfficial

We shall consider all this in season 4 and promise to try to come with new original violations

◯ 89   ⇄ 192   ♡ 1.4K   ⬆

lior raz @lioraz · Dec 27, 2020

Replying to @ICRC_ilot and @FaudaOfficial

68

Khaleej Times ✓
@khaleejtimes

Replying to @khaleejtimes

.@lioraz: This is the starting of the new beginning for the whole region -- both UAE and Israel...Khalaas! We want to live. We want to have peace.

Full interview here: bit.ly/2IusjXE

@FaudaOfficial @FaudaNetflix @netflix @issacharoff @GalGadot @IsraelintheGulf @Israel

> **Khalaas! We want to live and have peace... Enough with wars and hatred."**
>
> Lior Raz, actor and co-writer of Fauda

⟲ **lior raz Retweeted**

James Woods ✓ @RealJamesWoods · Oct 4, 2020   ...
What's exciting about FAUDA is that some of the stars and creators are the real deal. The sense of authenticity in the acting and staging is unmatched and unequaled anywhere on television. Superb filmmaking and storytelling by people who have lived it. twitter.com/PureLilac1/sta...

This Tweet is unavailable.

💬 92   ⟲ 219   ♡ 1.3K   ↥

Shaktiman @jagmagtubelight · Apr 2   ...
Replying to @EnemySlayer24_7
Best scene was when these guys went into Gaza to catch Al makadasi inside the barbershop, the fight scene looked surreal and the operation looked like its a real mission

💬   ⟲   ♡ 2   ↥

Motivated Base 👊 👊 👊 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 @bigmeanda... · Apr 4 · · ·

Replying to @DisemSila @FaudaOfficial and @IMDb

A very compelling show. Habibti is probably the limit of my Arabic...

💬 1   🔁   ♡ 1   ↑

Marion S. 🍀 @Momentsinthe · Apr 2 · · ·

Replying to @AlexWallasch @NetflixDE and @FaudaOfficial

Sehe ich gerade zum 2. Mal. Großartig.

💬   🔁   ♡ 2   ↑

Elias Gutkin @EGutkin · Apr 2 · · ·

Replying to @AlexWallasch @NetflixDE and @FaudaOfficial

Die Serie ist der absolute Hammer.

💬   🔁   ♡ 2   ↑

Wolfgang Osinski @osi28 · Apr 3 · · ·

Replying to @AlexWallasch @NetflixDE and @FaudaOfficial

Tolle Serie!

💬   🔁   ♡   ↑

Alexander Wallasch @AlexWallasch · Apr 2 · · ·

„Fauda" - israelische Agentenserie auf Netflix - Hamas, Islamischer Staat, Terrortunnel - geht das als Abendunterhaltung? Schauen wir ein Jahr später mal nach: @NetflixDE @FaudaOfficial

> „Fauda" – Israelische Agentenserie auf Netflix
> Die Kamera zeigt jemanden, der in einem ...
> 🔗 alexander-wallasch.de

💬 3   🔁 2   ♡ 11   ↑

Reddeux @DisemSila · Apr 4

One of my favorite TV shows is the Israeli series **@FaudaOfficial** which I watch over and over to practice my Arabic. I just found a documentary behind the series on @IMDb.... Outstanding

its very dangerous and
you must be aware.

💬 2   ⟲   ♡ 3   ⬆️

Pulkit Malhotra @PulkitMalhotra9 · May 10, 2020

#FaudaOnNetflix is an intense and surprisingly authentic series. Loses grip in between still manages to keep you engaged. I feel so ignorant to the Israel-Palestine conflict, before this series. It is Fauda is true sense. #HookedSeries

💬 2   ⟲ 1   ♡ 1   ⬆️

Show this thread

.inzozinziza. @nzizagilbert44 · 10m · · ·

I said bye to Hollywood after **FAUDA** 😂 😂

> **jv** @The256reaper · 11m
>
> Replying to @nzizagilbert44
>
> Yoooo I watched this thing and its liiiiiitttt...the whole story is just on point🔥🔥🔥

💬 1   ⟲   ♡ 1   ↥

.inzozinziza. @nzizagilbert44 · 20m · · ·

FAUDA. and please if you do watch this, watch it in Hebrew it's original(has Eng subtitle) 😄 😄

> **jv** @The256reaper · 3h
>
> Any Netflix movie or series one can recommend ?

💬 1   ⟲   ♡ 1   ↥