

An O'Toole for Anti-Israel Propaganda Big Lies Run Amuck in the New York Times Book Review

By Phyllis Chesler

I know what can happen when a book receives a major prize, is chosen by a television host who has millions of viewers, or receives a front page review in the New York Times.

My face was once on the cover of the New York Times (NYT) magazine but, more importantly, two books of mine received front page NYT's Book Reviews—*Women and Madness* (1972) and *Sacred Bond. The Legacy of Baby M.* (1988).

Thus, imagine my sorrow and disgust when I opened the March 1-2 edition of the NYT. There, taking up the entire front cover was a photograph of a devastated region. The accompanying text reads: "In his new book, Omar El Akkad considers and condemns the Western response to Gaza's suffering" by Fintan O'Toole.

And who is O'Toole? A distinguished Irish writer who, like his compatriot, Sally Rooney, views Israel's response to 10/7 as barbaric, revengeful, and "genocidal." O'Toole is pro-immigration and anti-Trump, and he frequently airs his views in the page of the New York Review Of Books (NYRB) as well as in all the major British and Irish media.

The NYT knows exactly whom to assign their reviews.



Author Omar El Akkad's book is titled *One Day, Everyone Will have Always Been Against This*. O'Toole describes El Akkad as a man who was born in "Egypt, grew up in Qatar, moved to Canada and now lives in Oregon." Well—really, anyone who is imaginative, certainly a novelist, can write about anyone living anywhere and in any century—right? Here's how O'Toole presents El Akkad's second novel:

"The site of the slaughter in (*One Day*) is called Camp Patience. In Arabic, patience is *sabr*: the name echoes the Sabra refugee camp in Lebanon, the scene of a mass killing of civilians, most of them Palestinians, by an Israeli-backed militia in 1982."

Stop. Right. Here. First, that camp was a highly weaponized camp of PLO terrorists, administered by UNRWA, whose systemic and historic support of Jihad terrorism has become a wee bit more acknowledged but not until 2025.

Second, that particular massacre in Lebanon was carried out by Christian Phalangists against PLO terrorists who had invaded, terrorized, massacred, and destroyed Beirut, the city that was once known as the Paris of the Middle East.

Third, what the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) did was to allow Christian paramilitary forces to enter the camp unchecked—and only a country like Israel actually admitted this and took public responsibility for having done so. No Christian country

or leader did so.

Fourth, and unsurprisingly, another Irishman, in his capacity as a UN Commission official, one Sean MacBride, decided that the IDF bore sole responsibility for this; he even described it as a "genocide." At least, thus spake Wikipedia.

However, and fifth, if you consult the Jewish Virtual Library you would learn that Lebanese Christian Phalangist militias were responsible for this massacre. Moreover, according to the IDF, the number of dead ranged from 460-800, of which only 35 were women and children. Further by comparison, "few voices were raised in May of 1985 when Muslim militiamen attacked two Palestinian camps in Lebanon and killed 635 and wounded 2,500 inhabitants." In a subsequent battle between Syrian Shia militias and the PLO, more than 2000 were killed. There was no outcry."

Sixth, the PLO soldiers were stockpiling weapons in bunkers in cells in these refugee camps. When one reads "refugee camp" one is meant to imagine peaceful, huddled civilian masses—imprisoned, but yearning to breathe free; however, the reality is more like Hamas in Gaza, which has wired the entire Strip, both above and below the earth for war, and stockpiled weapons in every hospital, mosque, and UN school.

Now that we've settled the obvious and immediate bias in O'Toole's review, allow me to note that, according to O'Toole, El-Akkad's novel is looking at Israel's alleged atrocities, (not Hamas's real atrocities), from the vantage point of the future. El-Akkad has written a "polemoir, a fusion of polemic and memoir. His narrator is that of a "suspect Muslim outsider in North America," a journalist who has "covered, among other things, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq."

Wait. Another. Minute. If so, why doesn't O'Toole quote something from the novel about the Taliban or about another monster, Syrian President Bashir Al-Assad? Are these realities

not mentioned? But I quibble. In truth, the point of O'Toole's review and, presumably, of this novel is that American liberalism was always a lie. Thus, El Akkad speaks for the "despair" of all those who "refused to vote for Kamala Harris because of the Biden administration's policy of arming Israel."

Oh God. Wait another goddamn minute. Biden's administration—and Obama's before him—were Hell on Israel. Enough said. No more time just now for another brief history lesson.

O'Toole congratulates El-Akkad for his "elegant irony" and describes his book as "a distraught but eloquent cry against our tolerance for other people's calamities."

OUR tolerance. He means the West's, America's, Trump's—not the European world's, not the Muslim world's. The same Muslim world that has refused to relocate Muslim Gazans—or, in the past, that has refused to allow Palestinians to become citizens or to be employed.

This problem of propaganda masquerading as fact, truth, deep thinking, literary grace is not confined to this review, this reviewer, this newspaper alone, but is now embedded in every venue, every human rights report, every Pallywood propaganda documentary given an Academy Award, and every academic discipline.

But just in case a NYT's reader missed the anti-Israel bias—Not to worry. In case anyone doubted the destruction in Gaza, the review itself is accompanied by a color photo of a destroyed Rafah in southern Gaza, with a single hijabbed woman and child walking. I wonder: Did she or her family enslave, beat, starve, or murder any of the Israeli hostages? Or, could the NYT not find a single photograph of all the Israeli communities that Hamas utterly destroyed on 10/7?

Surely looking back, we should also remember our indifference,

our bystander-ness, in the matter of the perpetually traumatized Israelis; the displaced Israelis, who are living in internal exile from both the north and the south; the ongoing Jihad within Israel itself as well as in Shomron and Yehuda; the 1846 kidnapped and murdered Israelis; the still captive and tortured Israelis beneath the earth in Gaza; and the Israeli families gathered in Hostage Square, wailing and keening, tormented, waiting.

Oh wait one more minute. El Akkad grew up in Qatar which, together with Iran, is the world's greatest sponsor of terrorism, including that of Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. I wonder whether El Akkad has been able to "shake off" (the supposed true or alternate meaning of jihad) his early indoctrination.

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