

Book Review: 'After the Pogrom' Is a Sobering Assessment of Our Cultural Moment

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A woman breaks down at the memorial to Amit Magnezi as family members and friends of the lost and kidnapped gather at the site of the Nova Festival to mark the one-year anniversary of the attacks by Hamas, in Re'im, Israel, on Oct. 7, 2024. Leon Neal/Getty Images

OPINION

By Mohammed Rizwan

Print

Commentary

I have long wondered why terrorism draws worldwide condemnation, unless the target is Israel. It's commonly seen that the condemnation of Hamas is "qualified," tentative, and reluctant. Why is this?

I finally got the answer in Brendan O'Neill's new book, "[After the Pogrom: 7 October, Israel and the Crisis of Civilisation](#)," published by Spiked, a British online political magazine. O'Neill, the former editor of Spiked, lays bare the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy the world exhibited in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks.

Layer by layer, O'Neill peels back the "morality" of those who either chose to stay silent after Oct. 7 or tried to justify the barbarism unleashed by Hamas. Let me give three of his most telling examples of how the established norms of liberal values failed a fundamental moral test.

He recalls academia's complicity with terrorism against Israeli Jews. University campuses were turned into encampment grounds to protest Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. Jewish students were hounded off campuses and were not even allowed to launch counter-protests. Day-in, day-out, Keffiyeh wearing "students" occupied campus spaces, at times encouraged by university administration. Even when media reports established a clear connection between these protests and funding from external sources, no action whatsoever was taken to clamp down on protesters.

O'Neill addresses the politics behind this.

Has there ever been a state as hated as Israel, he asks bluntly, and in answering the question he directly confronts the hypocrisy. He compares Western responses in media and academia with the lack of protest over human rights violations in other parts of the world, especially in Muslim states. Thousands of civilians can perish in the civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Sudan, and Myanmar without a foot touching the street in protest. Yet the minute Israel defends itself from

aggression and takes action against terrorism, the activists are buffing their placards and ironing their Palestinian flags.

Last but not least is the feminist class. How come the #MeToo mob that raised hell over a man's knee brushing a woman unexpectedly were silent on Hamas terrorists raping Israeli teenage girls? Few feminists stood in solidarity with these Jewish victims. As O'Neill notes, "It took UN Women 57 days to mention Hamas's violence against women."

But why? This is the crux of the matter.

It cannot be the Palestinian question, as Oct. 7 was not about politics or settlement. It was savage terrorism—plain and simple.

No, at the root, akin to what Mark Milke analyzes in "[The Victim Cult](#)," O'Neill identifies, "Having encouraged a culture of self-loathing towards our colonial past, we can not feign shock that some take pleasure in the vengeful 'anti-colonialism' of a movement like Hamas."

The rape and slaughter of innocents, then, is (perversely) permissible because it was done by "freedom fighters resisting occupation." And, in this case, the "occupiers" were (and are) Jewish.

This is nothing short of a return to tribalism—or, to be more blunt, barbarism. O'Neill convincingly makes the case—for those who need convincing—that Hamas is "a Jew-hating war machine that masquerades as a national liberation movement."

This is how the West's standards of morality and human rights could be so quickly and completely discarded when the victims were Jews.

But complicity is not only Jew-hatred; it is self-hatred. Turning a blind eye is civilizational suicide.

This is the greater danger—the subtle savagery that O'Neill refers to as Hamas's "pogrom apologism." Al Qaeda and ISIS lacked an apologetics campaign to win over the Western masses. It is here that Hamas has succeeded; and, thus, here is where all of us have a role in defeating this new kind of terrorism.

We can begin by clearing the waters that Hamas has muddied.

The pogrom apologists have successfully conflated terrorism and political rights. Post-9/11, the Western public understood that there was a clear difference between the general Muslim population and thugs like Al Qaeda and ISIS. But today, there is a failure to differentiate between Hamas and Palestine.

As O'Neill argues: "The October 7 pogrom raised to the surface of our societies like scum on water some of the most disturbing and regressive trends of our time. Clocking these trends and confronting them is the great pressing task of the 21st century."

Mohammed Rizwan is a visiting fellow at the Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy and director at the Council of Muslims Against Antisemitism. "After the Pogrom: 7 October, Israel and the Crisis of Civilisation," is published by Spiked.

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