

Antonino D'Anna

10

The **big** 
fear
after October 7th

PATRIOTS
FOR EUROPE FOUNDATION

For Kfir and Ariel Bibas

*For all the hostages,
in the hope they can return home.*

*For Joe Cohen
and all the people of Israel,
in recognition*

PATRIOTS
FOR EUROPE FOUNDATION

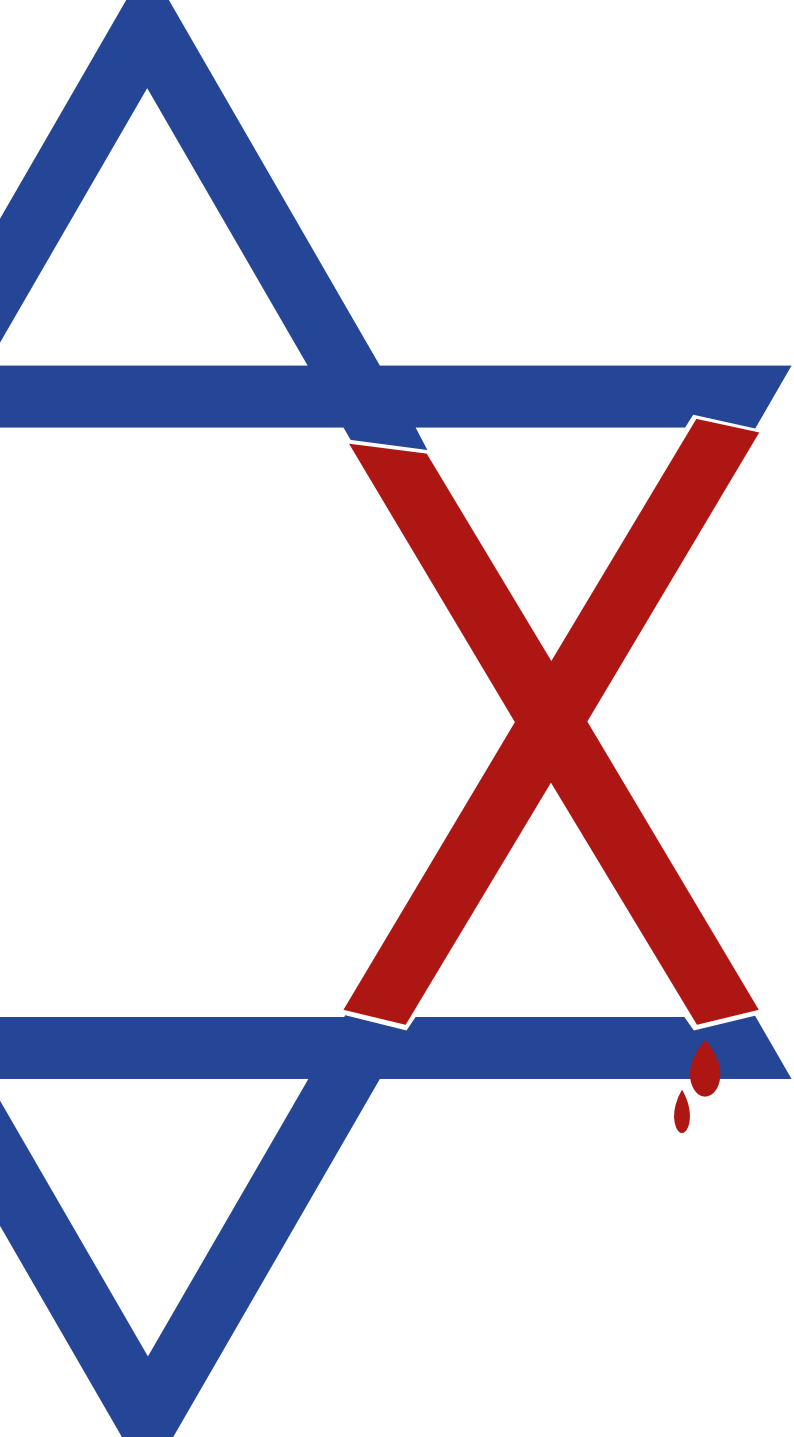
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Introduction

by Giovanni Sallusti, Managing Editor of *Radio Libertà*

This book by Antonino D'Anna is necessary and I would like to thank him once again for having developed a considerable part of it on Radio Libertà. When I say “necessary”, please do not imagine any ulterior motive of a merely promotional nature, at the risk of considering my contribution a simple note in the margin, rather than a preface. In this context, “necessary” means corresponding to both a historical, and everyday, necessity. Or at least, to something perceived as a necessity by anyone not yet ready to give up on that trisyllabic trifle which characterises the West: li-ber-ty. The aim is not to ruffle the feathers of Ugo La Malfa. And yet, perhaps it is, at a time when our gurus have become those such as Ghali or, at best, Fiorella Mannoia: “The freedom of the West is defended under the walls of Jerusalem”. La Malfa’s phrase (which, in reality, is nothing more than an acknowledgement of values) seems even more prescient today, especially in the wake of 7 October.

It is worth briefly recalling the events of 7 October (in-depth analysis of the multi-faceted significance of the horrors that occurred is just one of the vital contributions made over the following pages), since that terrible date has since been subject to a vast campaign of editing, if not rewriting (the anniversary of the massacre even witnessed gatherings in the name of the ‘Palestinian resistance’). 7 October was nothing more or less than proof that both Eric Hobsbawm and Francis Fukuyama were wrong. The twentieth century was not short; rather it continues to gnaw at the start of the new millennium. The end of history is a fallacy and we are hurtling towards yet another of its terrible convulsions. And of these multiple

signs of disaster, one stands out: murderous antisemitism. 7 October marked the vicious resurgence of the pogrom – the hunting, torture, throat-slitting, execution and annihilation of the Jew, simply for being Jewish. Those who fail to cross this minimal, yet vital, threshold of understanding may even believe, in good faith (though these cases are few and far between), that the reasons why the Middle East is (once again) running with blood relate to land, settlements, statehood or diplomatic recognition. The superficial coverage in the news seems to show that the historical fault line that is (once again) gaping wide is the result of a clash of civilisations. Yet, such an inference is not put forward by Antonino, nor by me; it is the view expounded by every anti-semitic cutthroat, all the way up to the cutthroat in chief himself, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei. They all hate the Jews (and wish to wipe the ‘Zionist entity’ off the map) since Jews are infidels, secular, governed by a liberal democracy, believe in a pluralism of values and religion, are not subject to Sharia law, do not cage their women behind a veil, permit the free pursuit of individual lifestyles and represent a blasphemous anomaly with respect to everything that surrounds them. They hate the Jews and attack them, above all because they are a reflection of the West. My West and that of Antonino, the readers of this book and even those who join demonstrations, waving their rainbow flags and screaming “free Palestine!”, while unaware of the personal treatment the gentlemen of Hamas reserve for members of the LGBT community: throwing them off the roof. What happens in the Middle East affects us, too. It is our world and our lives that are at stake, shielded for now by those of the Israeli soldiers (I would direct the reader particularly to the conversations with Anna Cinzia Bonfrisco and Magdi Cristiano Allam for more

on this key point). And what has been the standard response in the West – under attack through every Jewish throat cut? To spit in the face of these Israeli soldiers, of the Netanyahu government, of the State of Israel, of the Jew in general and, in an act of the utmost cultural masochism, of ourselves. In the most prestigious universities on both sides of the Atlantic, we have heard the obscene “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”, an explicit call for the eradication of the Jewish nation, a chant with a direct echo in the beer halls of 1930s Munich (for more on this academic madness, the interview with Alexander Kestenbaum, a Jewish-American student who has denounced the antisemitism in his university, Harvard, is essential reading). In Italy, blacklists of so-called ‘Zionist agents’ are being drawn up and published. And one of those appearing on such lists (and it tears my heart even to write this) is Liliana Segre, whose registration number was 75190 in Auschwitz. What we are facing is unquestionably a complete distortion of history, morals and existence itself. The horrors have returned, this time amid the applause of those kind souls who, once a year, soothe their consciences from their armchairs, by marking the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yet, how can such remembrance be honest or genuine without choosing a side now? With those who wish to bring back pogroms and wipe the Jewish state from the map or with the Jews themselves, who, with arms, technology and intelligence, seek to defend themselves, to ensure that #neveragain is not merely a comforting catchphrase on social media. So, yes, what follows is bloody necessary.

Preamble

WHY I MUST CONSIDER MYSELF A JEW

I was lucky enough to be born in Livorno – or rather in the countryside outside the city, which exists because the world exists. It is cosmopolitan by definition, irreligious and anarchic, a melting pot of peoples who gave birth to other peoples, with a mix of blood in their veins. And when it sees blood being spilt somewhere in the world, it weeps, since somewhere one of its children is suffering. It is the most Jewish city outside Israel and, for the Livornese, the Jews are our people. Or at least they were until yesterday, until an irrational boorish conformism, the fruit of ignorance and phoney rebelliousness, decreed that those who were murdered on 7 October 2023 count for nothing, that this recurrence of the holocaust can be denied in the name of a higher justice which makes the butchers of Hamas victims and the victims of Hamas butchers. And no one seems aware of the enormous contradiction that lies in putting a keffiyeh around your neck and screaming about fascism while behaving exactly like the Nazis by exercising the vilest denialism in the face of the blood spilt by innocent Israelis struck down by murderous hands while they merely celebrated their everyday lives. This work by Antonino D'Anna, who did me the honour of asking me to pen these brief notes, is a vital reminder of the truth, a powerful alarm signal highlighting a loss of democratic awareness and a condemnation of our spinelessness. It is impossible to sit on the fence here. We must choose whether to stand alongside Israeli democracy or succumb to the grim, bloody sirens of Islamic dictatorship. For someone born in Livorno, there should be no doubt as to which side

we should be on and yet sadly, even in my city, the weed of leftist conformism has taken root. This never happened when the Italian Communist Party governed the city but is an issue now that the left is suffering from the paroxysms of its narrow-mindedness.


When Livorno began to prosper under the influence of the Medicis, it issued the so-called *Leggi Livornine* (or Laws of Livorno) in 1591. The Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I, granted safe conduct and the broadest freedoms to all, but especially to Jews. When the Livornine Constitution was published in 1593, it was clear that, while these laws were aimed at merchants, the Medicis had drafted them to include Jews who, at that time, had suffered over a century of persecution from the Spanish after the 1492 decree from Queen Isabella. Livorno thus became the first city where the Sephardim could enjoy freedom of religion, safe even from the Inquisition, where they could own, disseminate and share books in Hebrew and attend Jewish schools, including rabbinic courses of instruction and last, but not least, be able to resolve legal differences between themselves in accordance with their own law. This is why Livorno never experienced a ghetto: Livorno is a city of the Jews. To such an extent that a unique language developed: Bagitto, a dialect which is a mix of Hebrew, Spanish and Tuscan and is only spoken in Livorno and its immediate surroundings. There is also Jewish/Livornese cuisine and, above all, a wealth of literature that ranges from sciences to law to fiction and biblical criticism. It is no surprise that the largest publishing house of Hebrew texts in Europe was established in Livorno. It was founded by Joseph Belforte, who published the first Hebrew prayer book in 1805. Salomone Belforte & Co. continues to publish today, under the direction of Guido Guastalla, and is an international

point of reference for Jewish culture. I know Guido will love this courageous work by Antonino D'Anna because it gives a voice to the voiceless: the defenders of Israel, the brotherhoods of Jews, who – and it would be well to remember this – are our big brothers, something recognised by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Karol Wojtyla witnessed, first-hand, the horror of the deportations of Polish Jews, victims of the wicked insanity of Nazism, before suffering the barbarity of communism, which cultivated an even more insidious antisemitism than that of the Nazis (if that were possible) inasmuch as it were both more pervasive and more hypocritical. This man, whom God chose as his ambassador, recognised that the sons of David embodied the very origins of our values. There is a trick that anti-Semites or duplicitous crypto-anti-Jews use to justify their hatred for the sons of God. They are decried for their quasi-supremacy in considering themselves the elected nation! This is false: Jews are the chosen people, not elected. They claim no superiority, but rather it is God himself who has tasked them with spreading the word of God, with all the due respect and fear. Hence, we may well, nay we must, consider them our big brothers. And the cries of outrage can never ring loudly enough against a Europe which has lost all meaning and refuses to identify itself in a Constitution where our Judaeo-Christian origins were the root of a common understanding between peoples so different and so far apart. In this Europe, the foundations seem to be financial – a common currency – and thus awfully similar to Judas, who, for 30 pieces of silver, sold all of our hope! This is the same Europe that boycotts Israeli universities and Israeli products, the same Europe which joins with the UN in condemning Israel, the sole democracy in the Middle East, the only land which has welcomed back its people. This is a hypocritical

Europe, as hypocritical as all those who, while rejecting the tag of antisemitism, fight against Israel alongside the Palestinian people. Indeed, historically, the latter have never actually existed and were only formed thanks to the Jews themselves who, having returned to their land in the late 1800s, invited the Arab tribes to join them, flourish and find new hopes for a better life. Anyone who claims today that Palestine will be free is a hypocrite. Palestine will only be free when the enemies of Israel have been defeated, the Islamic fundamentalism represented by Hamas, which has just one goal: to annihilate Israel and the Jews to pave the way for the ummah, a pan-Islamic society where only the enlightened – the Muslims – and the Dhimmi – the converted slaves – remain, since all infidels will have been exterminated. Mohammed writes in the Koran that there are three reasons for killing someone as punishment without committing a sin: adultery, avenging the killing of another Muslim and the ridda, or apostasy. Slaying an infidel is not a sin! Nor is it any secret that the death penalty is widely applied in various countries subject to Sharia law, something which those who defend LGBTQ+ rights and yet support Palestine in seeking the destruction of Israel and the Jews should remember – being homosexual in an Islamic country means a trip to the gallows. And this is the case in ‘beleaguered’ Palestine or rather Palestine held hostage by Hamas with Iranian arms. It is through this ‘dispersion’ that I recognise my good fortune: I am from Livorno and must consider myself a Jew. I am Livornese and understand the debt that Italian culture owes to Italian Jews; I am Livornese and I know how much the rights that we claim and enjoy today are the fruits of Jewish culture. I wish to recall here two intellectual giants: firstly, Ernesto Nathan, a beacon of light in the Risorgimento, the man who founded the Dante Alighieri

Society, the Mayor of a Rome newly freed from papal oppression who became famous among the common people for his phrase “*non c'è trippa per gatti*” [“there is no tripe for the cats”, used to mean that there is nothing that can be done]; secondly, a man from Livorno, who recognised Judaism in Italy, wove the fabric of dialogue between religions and fostered a spirit of culture and tolerance: Elio Toaff. Failure to recognise that our roots lie in their intellectual foundations shows a lack of both logic and emotion. I would like to thank Antonino D’Anna for his painstaking and insightful work in collating and publishing these testimonies, which call for the freedom of Israel, speak up in defence of Jewish integrity and proclaim the vital importance of Jewish culture. But I would also like to thank him for taking me back to my childhood and my grandparents’ library, where my teacher, Emma Azria, with seemingly infinite love and patience, would teach me the alphabet and arithmetic but, above all, instruct me in the grammar of tolerance and the poetry of freedom. Her childhood years were spent hidden away from the wickedness of the Nazis. We should all be lucky enough to have lessons about life from a Jewish teacher!

Carlo Cambi



One morning in early October

The date is Saturday, October 2023, a peaceful weekend such as we often experience when the echoes of summer are still in the air and autumn has not yet taken hold. It is just before 9 o'clock in the morning and I am sitting in front of this iMac on which, almost ten months later, I am now writing this book: the day ahead is fairly relaxed and there is no reason to break from my usual routine. I am a journalist for *Radio Libertà*, which, with its DAB+ signal, covers the whole of Italy and can also be viewed on digital terrestrial TV, channel 252. As per the schedule, I am in the middle of our press review with my friend and colleague, Piervittorio Scimia. The producer, Federico Borsari, is at his desk. In other words, everything is normal: Piervittorio is doing his usual analysis of the daily newspapers, whose front pages are shown on the screens of the website, Facebook page, Twitch account and YouTube account. “Peanuts and toffees” is the phrase I use when I present my programmes on the radio, as I have for almost four years now. I am also taking a look, although at 9:30 I will take Piervittorio’s advice and play *Il Garage de L’Alfista*, a 25-minute piece dedicated to the world of Alfa Romeo. We also have a guest today, our friend Alex Cereda, here to discuss some competitions. Just another half hour and it will be time for my break and I will hand over to Giorgia Pacione Di Bello, with her *Tax Girl*, an incredibly popular programme on tax matters. The minutes are sliding slowly by when, as usual, I open the websites of the news agencies. I normally only check out two of them: ANSA, for the latest news in Italy, and the BBC, to find out what is happening in the rest of the world. And then, as so often in the life of a journalist, History swoops in, takes over and casts me into hell. The time is 9:14 a.m., Italian time.

The news is that the Israeli armed forces are in a state of war because, at around 7:30 in the morning in Israel, or 8:30 in Italy, precisely when I am reading about it, a Hamas attack is declared in the south of the country. But this is not another terror attack like the others. According to the BBC, the terrorists are moving freely through the streets of the towns along the southern border with Gaza and, above all, shooting anyone who comes within range. The first reports talk of shootings in the cities, but then there is an assault on a military base not far from the defensive wall which, until just one hour ago, both Israel and the rest of the world considered impenetrable. I was sceptical until, just after 9, the BBC begins to publish the first videos, filmed with the mobile phones of the local inhabitants. In one of these, we are at a crossroads, a Hamas terrorist is advancing with a submachine gun – a kind of Rambo of the East. And he is shooting people. And killing them.

Something tells me that this is no longer just a ‘simple’ attack. And then I remember the date: 7 October. The anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto, yes, but Hamas has no interest in discussing the role of Pope Pius V and the Madonna of the Rosary, which is commemorated on this day. If anything, their focus is on events exactly 50 years before, on another 7 October, also one of humiliation: in 1973, during Yom Kippur, the Israeli festival of fasting and purification, when the Egyptians used modified irrigation pumps to break through some embankments (in reality, merely desert sand) on the right bank of the Suez Canal, where Israel, since 1967, had believed itself secure and invincible thanks to the Bar Lev Line, with the Chief of Staff convinced that those walls of sand would never be breached. And yet, all that was needed was a few petrol pumps – those used in the countryside to draw water from artesian wells – to blast water from the Canal

against the Bar Lev Line, break through and launch a raid into Sinai. Truly, a stinging humiliation for Israel.

And at this point, I automatically ask to cut in, as the BBC’s virtual ticker, before my very eyes, keeps sending more details and updates every 5 minutes. I insist, firstly with Federico and finally with Piervittorio, to let me interrupt the transmission and start to recount the events. I explain that an attack is in progress, that it seems extremely serious and that we will only know how serious over the next few hours. The initial reports start to appear on my screen. They are talking about abductions but we don’t yet know who. At a rave party near the border, in the middle of the desert, there seems to have been an absolute bloodbath. What the world does not yet know is that it is the Nova Festival, that the terrorists arrived on paragliders and began to shoot everyone, kidnapping, raping, but also massacring those poor young people, whose only crime had been going there to dance.

The clock shows 9:30 but confusion reigns. I cannot do a non-stop live programme nor tear up the schedule. What if things aren’t as serious as they seem? There is an empty space for questions and answers after *Tax Girl*, at 11:00. We will have an hour to discuss the attacks live, but I will need authorisation, and, above all, since I am on air at 9:30, I will need to cancel *Il Garage de L’Alfista* and continue to report live with Piervittorio. I call my editor, Giulio Cainarca, and explain the situation via WhatsApp. He realises that this is huge news and authorises me to do these two live emissions. I let the guys know, through Skype chat, that we will remain live on air until 10 and then, at 11, we will have another hour of live updates until midday.

Federico, Piervittorio and I work as a team. In just a few minutes, we switch from a ‘peacetime’ to a ‘wartime’ schedule.

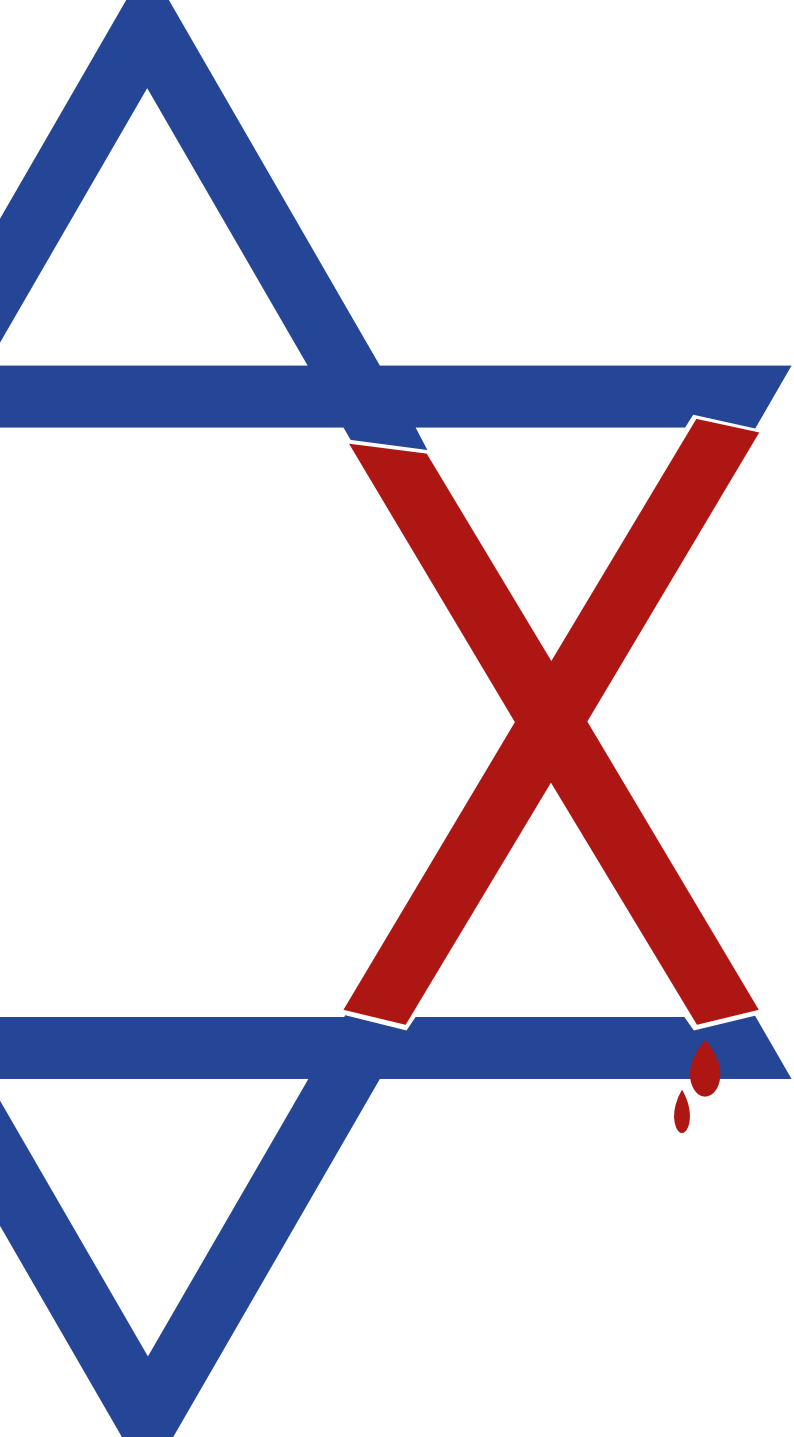
And we are thus able to recount the History happening before our eyes; this is the power of Radio – something created with words and minimal resources. And when I say minimal.... I am broadcasting through Skype with a 21-inch, Late 2009 iMac – a 14-year-old wreck, with a microphone which I bought together with a boom and power supply for about 50 euros a few years back. And yet, this is what I must make do with. The rest is simply a question of journalistic expertise, in explaining to an audience that knows nothing and cannot see anything the massacre that is taking place.

And so, at 9:30, while my Mac crashes and I am forced to reboot it, I start my live broadcasting by telephone: “Friends of mine, but not mere friends of fortune, good morning” (my usual greeting to my listeners). And then: “There is no *Il Garage de L’Alfista* today because History is knocking at our very door. At 14 minutes past 9 this morning, the BBC issued a dramatic news flash, reporting that the Israeli armed forces had announced their readiness for war. The reserves have been called up. At this very moment, Israel is conducting an intensive bombing campaign of the Gaza Strip because this morning, at around 8:30, terror attacks occurred across the country. Armed fighters are shooting, wildly and indiscriminately, in the streets of Israel. An intense barrage of rockets has also been launched from the Gaza Strip. This seems to be a surprise attack without precedent in the history of the country. Now, the historical references which come to mind, we might consider... we might go back to another surprise attack in October 1973, 50 years ago, the Yom Kippur War which led to the first oil crisis; but this situation is not linked to the conflict with Egypt – this is not the 1970s”. While this may not be the 70s, this surprise attack is worse than any Israel has suffered since then. And since 8:37 this

morning, when the BBC published the first news flash, the rockets have been flying and the terrorists murdering.

My Mac starts working again and I am back live, with both video and audio this time. I open the first WhatsApp messages and the initial responses are of shock and disbelief. And yet, this is happening right in front of us, as the scale of the attack starts to become clear, with its toll of agony and despair, while the Hamas butchers shoot some 5,000 young people in southern Israel and the country seems almost paralysed as it seeks to sketch out an initial response and defence. At the end of this unimaginable morning, which began in peace and finished in blood, 1,200 people have been killed, including children murdered in the most horrific ways and women raped and hacked to pieces. In addition, 250 innocent people – some Israeli, others not; some Jewish, others not – have been abducted and flung into the dark tunnels that Hamas has been building for decades with money from the West which should have gone to the people of Gaza and which, had it been spent on them, would have turned Gaza into the Rimini of the Eastern Mediterranean and not the pile of rubble and hatred that it is. And, of course, this is all great news for the Russians, delighted to see the world’s attention switch from Ukraine to Gaza and, naturally, the theocratic regime in Iran, which – as we will later discover – both pushed for and funded these atrocities.

The *Radio Libertà* live programme ends at 12:00. In the meantime, the papers and TV channels continued with their schedules as if nothing whatsoever had happened. I was even rebuked by a listener since, while the websites of leading daily newspapers were not providing any updates, I was live on air talking about Israel instead of cars. Then darkness.



Testimonies

Professor Gil Siegal

The Israeli army? An army which fights ethically and morally. And to learn about this special training, I reached out to Professor Gil Siegal, a doctor, legal expert and university lecturer, who divides his time between Tel Aviv and the United States and spoke to me on the phone from Tel Aviv. It was late August 2024 and time to take stock of the situation: what does being Jewish or pro-Israeli mean now and what are the risks in such an identity? What has the experience of the nightmare of 7 October 2023 been in Israel? This chat took place following several interviews he gave to me for *Radio Libertà* and I remember one vividly just after the outbreak of the war, when our conversation was interrupted by the words: “Excuse me, a bombardment has begun and I need to flee to safety”. For those of my readers who, just like me, have lived through almost eighty years of peace, this phrase seemed something from a bygone age. Yet the dangers are something all too current.

This interview was recorded on 19 August 2024¹

I would like to ask my guest to introduce himself because he is a key figure for this book. His name is Professor Gil Siegal, he lives in Israel, he is a doctor but also a professor of law. He teaches ethics in the USA and his travels have

¹ With the exception of the interviews taken from those conducted face-to-face on *Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti*, on the air from Monday to Friday from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. on *Radio Libertà* (and whose publication here was authorised by the managing editor of *Radio Libertà*, Giovanni Sallusti, whom we would like to thank), they are all the property of the author and published here for the first time.

taken him all over the West, but at the moment, Professor, how does it feel to be Jewish in Israel and in the West?

Let me introduce myself with just two words: I have always considered myself a cosmopolitan person. I love travelling from one country to another, I have friends of every nationality and not just from Israel and my career has taken me to all sorts of different places: Ethics in the Faculty of Law at the University of Virginia; Ethics, Bioethics and Genetics at the Faculty of Medicine in Tel Aviv; I teach risk management for insurance providers; I lecture in Ethics in Communication and Mass Media and I am a supervisor of ethics in broadcasting companies in Israel. In short, I am used to moving from one field to another. And so, when you ask me how it feels to be Jewish today, in Israel and around the world, this is something that affects me as an individual, as a professional and as a proud Israeli Jew. In my opinion, after the terrible periods of pogroms and the Crusades during the 12th century, after the pogroms in Russia, the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and the Second World War, our hope was that a new era had come. And yet, out of the blue, the terrible massacre of 1,500 Israelis – women, the elderly and children – dragged us right back to the time of the Crusades. Back to the holocaust. It was awful proof that the world has not learned how to curb and control violence and antisemitism, the very essence of pure evil. And as a man, I hope that, when confronted by darkness and light, we should know how to distinguish between them. And yet the world, or a part of it, has become totally blind to our view. As an individual, I can tell you that this is chilling, absolutely chilling. Because we believe that the world we live in is modern, developed, humanist and liberal and suddenly everything collapses around you. You can no longer be Jewish

in New York, at the University of Columbia, the University of California, in Athens or Milan – this is truly frightening and a shock of historical proportions. And this is my answer on an individual and personal level.

As a professional, and let me speak here as a doctor and legal practitioner, the quantity of anti-Jewish feeling – and let us state clearly that anti-Israeli feeling might be more understandable – but anti-Jewish feeling, is so deeply entrenched in hospitals and universities that every doctor and scientist writing articles on their research at the moment faces problems when it comes to publishing them, since their editors say: “Ah, but they are from Israel. We didn’t know. Perhaps the research wasn’t that great...”, and they tell lies to avoid publishing their work or give brutal, hard-nosed answers: “We don’t want to publish Israeli stuff, we don’t take work from Israeli researchers”. At a professional level, this is extremely concerning: some professional bodies and trade associations have denounced Israel without any idea about what is actually happening; they are calling for a ceasefire while forgetting that there are 250 hostages... no nation has suffered such events and, despite all of this, these professional bodies have adopted antisemitic and anti-Israeli positions, to such an extent that my professional identity has been profoundly shaken. I am currently travelling to the US to teach and that’s something I always relish, but my colleagues in New York, at the UCLA and Berkeley are telling me stories of animosity, violence and even complicity on the part of the university authorities. And this is all extremely, terribly worrying.

And lastly, there is my identity as a proud Israeli: we are a nation at war, a long-lasting and harsh war. We are using our resources and counting our dead on a daily basis: just today, three soldiers were killed, leaving behind three families and

communities and often these are people that we know. It is all very painful, but just like the Jews in the Bible, when they were in Egypt, the more the Egyptians persecuted the Jews, the stronger they became. Just as when you want to produce high-quality steel, you compress it and hammer it and thus make it stronger: we Israelis are incredibly strong and faithful. Times are hard, but it is during the hardest times that the strongest nations are formed.

You referred to the Crusades but in 2000, Pope John Paul II asked for forgiveness for them and for the antisemitism of the Catholic Church. Do you believe that, one day, an Islamic authority will apologise for all that they have done to the Jews?

What an excellent question! It makes me emotional. Never would we have thought that the Christian institutions would have recognised their mistakes. I am no expert on Christianity but I feel it must be a Christian strength to condemn the mistakes made in the past and strive to do better. But if you look at radical (and even non-radical) Islam today, when you see the migrants arriving in Europe and here they demand the imposition of *Sharia* law, when they seek to become martyrs, this appears to me to be the exact opposite of the Christians' acknowledgement of their mistakes. I really hope that these radical Muslims (or those who are not quite so radical) manage to see the other side of Islam, such as that in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE have shown a different way of being Muslim, with the Sunnis agreeing to completely overhaul their educational programmes, denouncing violence and started working together with the Jews. They no longer portray them as filthy animals, as radical Shiites do. We need different leaders for this to happen in the Muslim world. If

this were the direction of travel, I would absolutely support it, but when you listen to what they are saying in the streets, when you see these acts of violence and the most dangerous Muslims, I find it hard to believe.

Why, when another three IDF soldiers are killed does no one in the West say anything and instead, every day, we see and hear protests, people speaking up for Palestine and chanting “*From the river to the sea*”², which I find a horrifying battle cry akin to Nazi slogans such as *Sieg Heil*? Why is there this double standard between those who die in Israel or are kidnapped, rapped and tortured in Israel and the people dying in Gaza?

I think that the heart of the problems lies in the education of European teenagers and middle-aged Europeans. After the Second World War, Europe was tired of war, having witnessed it in all its devastation. This period saw the birth of pacifist movements, the greens, the environmentalists, all of whom seek to avoid political friction and any armed conflict. Of course, this makes perfect sense. However, you must be able to defend your homeland. To justify their struggle and prevent war, these movements ensure that the weakest are put in the strongest positions and the target for their attacks thus becomes the strongest, the biggest and the most powerful. The result is that, when one party is weak and the other strong, the stronger party is always to blame. And so, you support the weaker party, compensating for the imbalance between the two and thereby reducing the opportunities for war and aggression. In Europe, there has always been this

² *From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*, i.e. from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean. This is the cry of the pro-Palestinians.

movement which sympathises with the weakest. Now, in the case of Israel versus the surrounding Arabic countries and so-called Palestinians, it is obviously the Israelis who are stronger. According to the reports seen by foreigners, it has more powerful weapons, more advanced technology, a healthier economy, biotech, etc. Hence, Israel is stronger and the Palestinians weaker and in need of support, protection and the right to do whatever they want. And when it comes to supporting the Palestinian underdog, Europeans simply do not care how it behaves. This confused and vague rationale is what leads Europeans to say: “Right, we don’t want war: the reason for this war in the Middle East is because Israel does not want to give the Palestinians what they want and, in any case, even if they were to give the Palestinians everything they wanted, we wouldn’t give a shit about peace because our only desire at the moment is to pander to the weaker party and so we will stand with the Palestinians, no matter what they do. Their actions do not matter, nor do their responsibilities for the deadly choices they make”. The Palestinians have been offered the chance for their own state several times and they have refused. And every time they refused, they gave their answer not just through a simple “no” but by launching violent attacks. Thanks to God, they have always lost, but they are committed to a constant cycle: attack-lose-whine-receive support-regain strength-attack-lose-wine... again and again.

Whining and asking for help, right? One of the parties helping the Palestinians is Iran, which has sworn revenge after the death of Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas. And yet, nothing has happened yet. What do you think is going on between Israel and Iran and how do things stand? Do you think it might lead to war?

Let me start by saying that Iran does not care about Palestine at all. Let me repeat: Iran does not care about Palestine at all. The Palestinians are Sunnis, the Iranians Shiites. They could not care less. But they use the Palestinians for their most important cause, which is the destruction of Israel. They would use Christians, Buddhists or anyone else to destroy Israel: for Iran, the Palestinians count for nothing – they are merely a tool. Now, Iran lies some 600 km from Israel. This is a vast distance and they are unable to fight the Israelis directly. They have missiles and drones but it is extremely hard for them to attack Israel directly. And so, they use proxies: one is Hezbollah, to the north of Israel, while others are Syria and the Palestinians in Gaza, Judea and Samaria. They are puppets in the hands of the Iranians used to destroy Israel. A war between Tel Aviv and Tehran would be impossible because of the distance, which is why Iran will use butchers willing to work on its behalf. The real war will come from Gaza, Judea and Samaria and Lebanon. Why? Because Iran has nothing to lose: the dead will be Lebanese, Palestinians and Israelis; the Iranians will lose nothing and risk nothing. And they won’t stop: the only thing they do is to send money and medical aid to those areas but they will risk nothing themselves. The Israelis have been very, very clear: if Iran strikes, the response will be serious, substantial and severe. I am not a soldier; I am just an Israeli. However, I would advise the Iranians to take this warning seriously.

Professor, we understand that Israel is fighting and taking on a huge challenge: destroying Hamas, living free and perhaps, one day, achieving a two states for two peoples solution. But the war has now been going on for 10 months: do you think that the West understands the

challenge you are up against? And I am asking you this today, 19 August 2024, because, in just a few hours, we will be able to follow the Democratic convention in the USA by internet or satellite. Do you think that America understands your responsibility or do you believe that a Democratic administration led by Kamala Harris will cause you problems?

I feel that the people around the Democratic electoral campaign have forced the party into anti-Israel positions – at certain times – while there is no doubt that Joe Biden's administration has always given my country its full backing, including from a military perspective. But there are huge problems in the Democratic Party at the moment and that is something we need to understand. However, let us be clear: the Iranian threat against Israel is not aimed only at Israel but at the West as a whole. Iran can block the oil trade; it can alter the balance of power in the Middle East and the surrounding areas; it can strike in Yemen, Somalia and other African countries, not just in Asia and its immediate neighbours; Iran is a global force that threatens and intimidates much of the West. And I would like to reiterate that Iran's considerable capacity to finance global terrorism is not only a threat for Israel, or for Jews. The West is thus facing a regime which is extremely volatile and is encouraging and fomenting violence against civilians and against western institutions and that America, in defending Israel, is defending the first fragment of the West against Iran's attempt to spread radical Shiite Islam everywhere.

We have heard about this issue many times and I have said that we should be grateful to those brave men and women, some of whom have only just turned 20, who are fighting

in *Merkava* tanks, in tunnels or with the air force or the navy in the defence of Israel. And we should be grateful to them because they are the only bulwark that is actually protecting our Western freedoms, but now – as you have said – the West is blind. Is there any possibility, do you feel, for the West to survive? Or have we already submitted? I am thinking of the protests in France, the UK and so on.

I think that Europe suffers from a lack of awareness of the world's most important problems. If I may be allowed to use the famous expression of a 'clash of civilisations', Europe is older, slower, more disdainful and less dynamic. The new waves of immigration arriving in other countries, from Canada to Australia, are witnessing a clash between the contempt of the old and the anger, hunger and extreme religious zeal of the young waves of migrants. This is a crossroads for Europe. In Israel, if you read comments in the press describing the situation in Europe, many of them claim that the Old Continent has already fallen, that Europe is no longer able to resist this transformation. I am less pessimistic and more optimistic. I feel there needs to be a more in-depth understanding of the real threats to society from some of these groups which are exploiting the benefits of democracies, the social and financial benefits of these prosperous democracies they wish to destroy. I find all of this unacceptable and we need to take countermeasures. Which? Well, this is a long story and quite another topic that involves ethics, politics, law, religion, cooperation... It is a task that is daunting to say the least but, in any case, the chances of putting an actual stop to all of this grow more slender by the day. And Europe needs to wake up.

On your Instagram account, you explain the situation in Israel, setting forth the reasons why Israel is fighting. But I have also seen that the country is giving lessons in ethics to IDF soldiers. What does it mean to be an ethical army?

An ethical army means that, whereas in the past the sole thing that counted was victory, no matter the cost, the Israeli army now respects the strictest laws of war. I can give you empirical evidence of this: in Gaza now, there have been 26-27,000 deaths. These are according to our reports: the 40,000 deaths claimed by Hamas are a huge lie. 26-27,000 is the more accurate figure. Of these, 16-17,000 are terrorists, including those from the *Nukhba*³ forces unit. This is a ratio of less than 1:1 between civilian deaths and terrorists killed. It is the greatest result ever achieved by an army in the history of armed conflicts. It is simply unprecedented, and any expert on military matters with a minimum of decency and intellectual honesty would tell you: “I would never have imagined that Israel could eliminate, solely or predominantly, Hamas militants from a civilian population with such accuracy”. It is an incredible and unprecedented result. And it is only possible by investing – as we have – huge resources in ensuring respect for moral and ethical objectives on a daily and hourly basis, with every shot, every bomb and every attack. You know exactly what you are attacking and you take pains to limit collateral damage. This is the truth.

³ The elite unit of Hamas fighters (*Nukhba* means ‘elite’), responsible, among other things, for the atrocities of 7 October 2023. Their duties range from ambushes to specific raids, from infiltrating Israel through tunnels to attacks with anti-tank missiles, rockets and sniper rifles. This unit is also responsible for ensuring the safety of the senior commanders of Hamas. Taken from <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronaca-internazionale/cosa-sono-forze-d-lite-nukhba-gruppo-militare-speciale-hamas-2226309.html>

It is not some fabrication for the gullible and I would never stoop to such things. This is the truth. The data shows that this 1:1 ratio is unparalleled. In Mosul, in Afghanistan, the ratio between civilian victims and combatants was much, much higher and I am proud of the skill and expertise of the Israeli soldiers. How can such a result be achieved? By going to speak to the soldiers again and again, sometimes in the field, by addressing their doubts, discussing their operational practices, ensuring that they carry out orders, the fact that they carry them out as precisely as possible and strictly obey the rules of engagement when firing, warning people and so on. This is part of the everyday behaviour of the IDF and anyone who denies this is simply a liar.

Just one more question, Professor. Firstly, I would like to thank you for your time. But there is one thing which never ceases to amaze me: although you have been fighting such a long war, although in its 76 years of existence, the State of Israel has faced terrible trials, you are the fifth-happiest people in the world. How do you manage this in spite of everything?

Because we are optimists. As I have already said, the more you hammer the steel, the stronger it gets. The Japanese suffered similar treatment for a long time and came out of it much stronger. And anyone who deludes themselves that Israel will be wiped off the face of the Earth should be sectioned: this will never happen.

And these are the facts. *Am Israel Chai!*

Yes. We Israelis are a happy people and want to live in prosperity and ensure that others enjoy the same. If the others were to put down their arms, they would enjoy a wonderful

life, but at the moment they have no interest in that. Their only goal is to destroy the State of Israel. In conclusion, there are two sides: one wants peace, prosperity and life, while the other seeks death, destruction and the annihilation of the Jews. Which would you choose?

Peace, prosperity. And friendship.

Me too

Elisabetta Fiorito

Being a journalist and talking about Israel means taking a risk. And no one is more aware of this than Elisabetta Fiorito, 'guilty' of having written a fascinating biography of Golda Meir, the legendary female Prime Minister of Israel, and thus attracting the ire of pro-Palestinian activists. And without a word being raised in her defence by feminists and the left which, at one time, was a passionate defender of Jews and Jerusalem. But no longer. Something has changed. And she believes that this rot started to set in during the Six-Day War all the way back in June 1967. Is that all? No. For her to be criticised for a book that was not to the liking of pro-Palestinians shows that something, including here in Italy, is deeply wrong. And what we are witnessing in the cultural realm is nothing short of tragic: can the presentation of a book really become something dangerous?

This interview is taken from the episode of *Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti* on 14 March 2024.

This evening, I am delighted to have with me a colleague, Elisabetta Fiorito, a journalist from *Radio24*. I would like to thank her for agreeing to be on the show: Elisabetta is the author of the book *Golda – Storia della donna che fondò Israele* [Golda – the story of the woman who founded Israel], published by Giuntina. The book was released on 27 February. Obviously, when planning to release of a book, history and all its upheavals cannot be taken into account. You simply cannot foresee what might happen. This is something planned months in advance. However, in the meantime, there were the events of 7 October and all their consequences. One of these consequences was that last

week you were the victim – correct me if I am wrong – of an attack by a group of people who burst into the bookshop in Florence where you were presenting your book and forced you to leave. But let me check the calendar. It is 2024 or 1938? Welcome.

I asked myself the same question. What I found bizarre was that this protest was organised by two web activists, one of whom is an author of books on the murders of women. Protesting against a book about a woman who was the first Israeli woman prime minister – and actually the first prime minister in the world without any family ties with her predecessors – seems completely absurd. That is the first thing. Secondly, you said that I started to write this book a year and a half ago, when war had not yet broken out. We had planned to finish it earlier but then you know how things are when you are publishing a book and thus it came out during the war. This was not intended. It was a total coincidence. Golda Meir is a woman who founded the State of Israel. She was a Zionist, a socialist, a left-winger who would have had nothing, or very little, in common with the government of Bibi Netanyahu. And so, objecting to a book about Israel, about an Israeli prime minister, does not mean taking a stance against the war in Gaza or in favour of a free Palestine; it means objecting to the State of Israel *tout court*, because otherwise this would make no sense at all.

And as you have said in listing the characteristics of Golda Meir, her strengths make her anything but fascist. However, it seems to me that in Italy today, talking about Israel attracts automatic criticism, in spite of the atrocities of 7 October, especially those committed against women. The Hamas terrorists raped and murdered them and, if you

will allow me to say so, I am stunned that women who have experienced and grown up in freedom, democracy and Western rights will protest against someone like Golda Meir (who was always a staunch defender of women) and above all decry a struggle against a terrorist movement which uses human shields and then blames Israel. Because there is also a subtle media war conducted by Hamas against Tel Aviv, right?

Yes. And then there is the fact that, here in Italy, people always seem to need something to support. And nowadays it's about supporting whoever is opposing Israel. In just the last few days, three terrorists have been arrested and there have been demonstrations against the extradition of this alleged terrorist (far be it from me to disregard the presumption of innocence) to Israel. According to the protesters, the issue is that they would not receive fair treatment in Israeli prisons. That's not for us to say. I consider Israel a democratic country but the Italian judge – and we respect the verdicts – decided to block extradition. Fine, but I think we need to read between the lines here. This individual was plotting attacks not only in the West Bank or Israel, but also in Italy. It is worth recalling that, with the exception of domestic terrorism, the only casualties of international terrorists during the Years of Lead [a period of political violence between the late 1960s and late 1980s] in our country were victims of Palestinian terrorists. And our country seems to have forgotten this. I understand the distress at the events in Gaza, but I must stress that the war, here in Italy, triggered a wave of antisemitism *tout-court*. This antisemitism has crawled from the sewers and now anyone who is Jewish is expected to justify themselves; it's as if I, as an Italian, needed to justify myself for the words of Matteo Salvini, Elly Schlein or Giorgia Meloni. It is not

that Israelis are identified with Bibi Netanyahu, but rather that you are identified directly with him solely because you are Jewish. And beware! We are all saddened by the war (a war which, as I always say, needs to end now), but it is not up to us to make the decisions for a democratic country with a government of national unity which is striving to cause the fewest possible civilian casualties. And here again, when it comes to the victim count (and we all wish there were fewer), we need to understand that the figure comes from the Hamas Ministry of Health and thus needs to be taken with a large pinch of salt. Nobody is denying that there is a state of war and that the situation is terrible. However, we would like to know where the money we have given to Gaza over the years has ended up. Why are the Gazans unable to build a power plant and need to get their electricity from Israel? Why are all the Hamas leaders, with their billions, in Doha? We should be discussing this civilly; instead, there is a widespread stereotype in which the Jew is guilty of all the evil in the world. They call me “murderous Zionist”. It’s madness! So, let’s turn down the temperature a little: this is a history book. You might like it or you might not. And if you don’t, then don’t buy it! If you wish to boycott me, then just don’t buy my books, rather than turning the clocks back to 1938 or 1933, when Goebbels organised the famous burning of books considered undesirable by the Nazis in front of the Berlin State Opera. I cannot understand these activists and their concept of democracy. Go and join a pro-Palestine demonstration, but don’t come to protest against a book. I was forced to skip another presentation (I can’t reveal where) because there was a warning and the organisers decided not to go ahead. While I do understand them, what should I do now? I organise a presentation, pro-Palestinians turn up,

whom I would qualify as extremists since it is impossible to reason with them, and then what happens? Perhaps the DIGOS [anti-terror law enforcement agency] arrive and give them a beating and I feel responsible because perhaps some of those struck were peaceful protesters. This is purely a hypothesis. The fact is that there has been an outbreak of football hooligan-style behaviour which I simply cannot understand. They are objecting to a book about a historical leader. If they really want to support Palestine that much, then they should write a book on Arafat, on the Palestinian resistance, on anything they like! I might not buy it, or perhaps I would because I am curious by nature and I like to hear opposing points of view (unlike these people, I am extremely open-minded and I want to hear what the other side has to say). But I cannot understand why you would protest against a book about a historical leader, who died in 1978, who was against territorial occupation and also absolutely against the two states for two peoples solution because she believed that Israel would be unsafe. And so... you don’t like my book? Then don’t buy it! I cannot accept this squadrisimo [a term used for a policy of violence adopted by squads of fascists after the First World War]...

‘Squadrisimo’. That’s the exact term...

...but a squadrisimo of the left! There is not just squadrisimo of the right; this is squadrisimo of the left. Of the extreme left. It means that you are against freedom of expression. Let me repeat: if these activists wrote a book on Arafat, I would buy it myself! But if I wasn’t interested, I simply wouldn’t buy it!

And yet, Elisabetta, something came to me as you were speaking. It’s not just your heartfelt testimony. I can also

feel a subtle layer of tension. At certain points, it as if I were talking with someone who had been the victim of Mafia threats. Let me be clear here: I am not seeking to compare the two, obviously not! However, how do we get to a point where a journalist and author, a civilised person, is so terrified or, at least, anxious enough to say: “So, what should I do now? Should I go to present this book or not? Or would it be better to keep my head down”.

No, but above all... well, I obviously left with a heavy heart. I would have liked to have talked to those young people, for example. But it was to avoid any trouble and out of respect for the police and the organiser, who could have pulled the event entirely (because there had been warnings there, too, but the organiser is particularly courageous), that I left through the back door. And then I saw a group of young people and I would have spoken to them. But they didn't want to speak; they just wanted to shout that I was a murderer. You see? I felt as if I were responsible for the war in Gaza! This is madness. And there are some things that need to be said. I totally agree with what you said at the start of our conversation: we need to remember that there is just one guilty party in this war and its name is Hamas!

Exactly. Not the Palestinian people.

Not the Palestinian people, no! I have never said a word against the Palestinian people.

Exactly. Hamas is not Palestine.

It is the Palestinians who, at some point, need to understand that they must stand up against Hamas themselves. But it is not up to me to do or say anything. Yet, we must understand that there is now a sense of alarm since I have realised that

– after they arrested those people and these violent fringe groups have started up – as soon as I say that I have to present my book on Golda Meir, the DIGOS are on red alert. Do you think that the DIGOS should be put on high alert for a simple book presentation?

Absolutely. It is crazy that we have got to this point.

However, there are now these fringe groups and I am sorry, but the left needs to speak up and say: “Guys, calm down”. Yesterday, I went to Montecitorio. Fratoianni was there, with Bonelli, and Bonelli barely acknowledged me instead of asking: “Betta, what happened to you?”. They should be saying “Are you guys crazy?”, since they are the ones who represent these protesters to an extent. And yet, there was no such appeal. They did nothing because, if you are a Zionist, then you are a murderer. I am a Zionist because I believe in the existence of the State of Israel. I have never said that I do not believe in the existence of a Palestinian state. However, when I hear protesters chanting “*From the river to the sea*”, this means erasing the State of Israel. They couldn't care less. All they want is for Israel not to exist!

At this point, they might as well raze Auschwitz to the ground and turn it into a car park. What is the point of remembering the holocaust if you then want to erase the State of Israel?

The thing which really scares me, apart from the total ignorance of history from those who don't know that Gaza was handed back in 2005 and the settlers evacuated by Ariel Sharon, who has one of the hawks... The total ignorance. And then, above all, the idea that Jews continue to be guilty of all the evils in the world, because there is the war in Ukraine and

no one cares; there was the war in Syria and no one cares; no one talks any more about the Iranian women and their civil revolution (and I can't help but suspect that it is because Iran is an ally of Hezbollah and Hamas that women no longer merit a mention in demonstrations by the left)... well, this relativisation of victims, events and everything seems some sort of mass hallucination. And I feel that the leading figures on the left need to start telling these young people to calm down.

But, Elisabetta, this is what I would like to ask you: until around the year 2000, defending Israel, Zionism and international Judaism was typically the province of the left. And then, at a certain point, we started to hear the slogan "I stand with Israel but not with Sharon", and then we come to 2006 and Massimo D'Alema – who, if I remember rightly, was then the Minister for Foreign Affairs – who went for a walk round Beirut on the ruins of a building knocked flat by Israel alongside a politician from Hezbollah. And now it's 2024. And you, a woman of peace, are 'guilty' of having written a book! It won't take long before the protesters start arriving with truncheons. Because that wouldn't surprise me, at this point. What has happened to the left in Italy that has given rise to all of this, do you think?

It all began in 1967, with the Six-Day War. Golda's words are key here: they tell us to return to the borders of the Six-Day War, but we were already there before the war.

Exactly. And she said the same thing to Oriana Fallaci in 1973.

I think this all started long ago, after the Six-Day War, when the Italian left revolted and the whole situation was turned

upside down; then there was the – horrendous – episode of the Moro Doctrine, which is something that all governments (and not just that of Moro) have been guilty of, since Palestinian terrorists were able to establish bases in Italy in the hope that they would refrain from attacking us, a hope which proved vain since there were two attacks at Fiumicino Airport, in 1973 and 1985, and then the notorious attack on the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1982. And so, what worries me is this: at that time, the world was divided into blocs, and then, in the 70s, we had problems with Gaddafi and oil. Then Italy as a whole, from the Christian Democrats to the Italian Communist Party (except for Giovanni Spadolini and the Republicans), embraced the Palestinian cause. And what I would say today is that we need to be careful because we are not embracing the Palestinian cause. We have a leader of Hamas, with assets of \$5 billion, who lives in Doha. All of this money should have gone to the Palestinian people and they never received it. And so, there is this sort of myopia which I find simply incomprehensible. "*Free Gaza from Hamas*" – this would be my slogan...

Mine, too....

...and then there is this operation which is still underway because, according to the Israeli government, the Hamas leadership has not yet been eliminated. However, when I see Sinwar escaping through the tunnels with the girl with the teddy bear, after murdering children, hacking them to pieces and putting them in the microwave, I am chilled to the core. And to think there are those who would attack Liliana Segre! What bravery!

But there are some who dare to claim that it is untrue that the Hamas terrorists did anything to children. And that

poor woman at the *Non una di meno* demonstration in Florence, who was carrying a pro-Israel poster. They told her: “Go home, Fascist”, claiming that it was false that Hamas had murdered children or raped women with those horrifying details we all know.

But what I would say at this point is that this squadrismo must be condemned, both on the right and on the left. We saw the fascist salutes at the Acca Larentia commemorations and they must be condemned. But just as they must be condemned, so must the actions of the extreme left. We need to return to a spirit of democracy and healthy debate. I am a genuine feminist and when I see the demonstrations of 8 March exploited for Palestine, I find that unacceptable! Unacceptable! We need to protest for the rights of all women: Palestinians oppressed by Hamas, Iranians, and Italians murdered by their husbands! And for me, even the title of the demonstration, ‘Against the Patriarchy’ was wrong, since it is your husband who kills you, not your father. On the contrary, perhaps if the father of Giulia Cecchetti had been stricter at the time, you know... it is difficult to say. I don’t wish to say anything against a father who has lost his daughter but I am from the boomer generation and my father would perhaps have been stricter and it may have been more difficult for such a person⁴ to worm his way in by passing himself off as a good lad. Because this is always the way: the monster hides behind the good lad. It is always hard but we must be vigilant. The fight is always against the patriarchy and yet, while we know that there are some nutters who sadly kill the wife or children, in most cases it is the wife or girlfriend who is murdered. In conclusion, there seems

⁴ Filippo Turetta, the ex-boyfriend and killer of Giulia Cecchetti.

to be some confusion about terminology. It is always about slogans and never about etymological research into words. I find that there is this inaccuracy which gives rise to the kind of violence that really concerns me.

It is like we have gone back to the worst of the 70s. And yet without the best, sadly...

I don’t feel that way, but when I saw that they had arrested that person who was planning attacks, I was chilled, because it is just one tiny step from plans to actions. The climate of antisemitism which developed in 1982 after the Sabra and Chatila Massacre, carried out by Lebanese Phalangists, is to blame for some of this. That was a mistake by the Israeli army, which was acknowledged by the country. We have seen *Valzer con Bashir*, which is an Israeli, rather than Lebanese, film. Because when Israel, as a democratic state, makes a mistake, it admits it. And so, let us be clear: Sabra and Chatila caused the attack on the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1982 and the death of little Stefano Gaj Tachè⁵,

⁵ On 9 October 1982, a group of Palestinian terrorists belonging to the Fatah Revolutionary Council, or Abu Nidal Organisation, threw at least three hand grenades and then opened fire with machine guns on the faithful as they left the Great Synagogue of Rome at the end of a function during the Jewish festival of *Shemini Atzeret*, a celebration of the conclusion of one and the beginning of another annual cycle of readings from the Torah. Stefano Gaj Tachè was struck in the head by a fragment from a hand grenade and was the only person killed. There were 40 casualties, including his brother, Gadiel, who was just 4 years old. The sole terrorist recognised, Osama Abdel Al Zomar, was arrested on 20 November 1982 for arms trafficking in Greece (while exporting explosives to Turkey) and extradited to Libya as a free citizen at the end of his sentence. He was convicted in absentia in 1991 by the Court of Appeal of Rome but never spent a single day in prison in Italy. He is believed to have remained in Libya until 2011 and the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

a two-year-old child. And it was a miracle that he was the only person who died, because I have friends who still have shrapnel from the explosion inside their bodies and cannot pass through a metal detector without setting it off. There are some who were very close to death, including Gadiel Gaj Tachè, Stefano's brother, who wrote a wonderful book⁶. He was a child and very nearly perished. It was a close thing: one of my friends had been given up for dead. And so, we must be vigilant, because this climate is getting worse and not only the government – which, I must confess, is particularly diligent in monitoring possible attacks – but also the left now need to speak up. And this is my view.

Elisabetta, we are nearly out of time but I still have one more question for you. Or rather two. The first: Golda Meir, especially in the famous interview she gave to Oriana Fallaci in 1973 – an interview that she actually had to repeat because the tapes were stolen, as revealed in Fallaci's book *Intervista con la Storia* [Interview with History] – was a pioneer of feminism. She explained to Fallaci her role as the leader of Israel and how they wished to live in peace with their neighbours. But she also said something concerning which we saw some years later on Gaza television, controlled by Hamas: "George Habash – the leader of Black September – asks Palestinian children to solve these maths problems: 'You have five Jews and you kill two of them. How many are left?'" Almost thirty years later, we saw a Hamas version of Mickey Mouse ask the same question on Gaza television. On the one hand,

⁶ The title of the book is *Il silenzio che urla – L'attentato alla Sinagoga di Roma del 9 ottobre 1982* [The Silence that screams – The attack on the Great Synagogue of Rome of 9 October 1982], published by Giuntina.

there is someone seeking to defend themselves, while on the other is someone raising future generations in a spirit of hatred. What do you think Golda would do to address this situation? And my second question: will you continue to present your book or, if you could go back in time, would you prefer never to have written it? I know that this is a horrible question for any writer because it is like a relationship between a mother (or father, of course) and her child and to disown it feels almost like an act of murder.

Firstly, let me talk about what Golda would have done: in 1956, she entered Gaza – because Gaza and Sinai were handed over three times by Israel despite its victories in three wars –, saw the situation and said: "I cannot believe that the Arab leaders would leave the Palestinians in refugee camps just to use them as a political tool. We took in 800,000 Jews expelled from Arab countries following the Six-Day War – though no one ever talks about this – and we welcomed them, gave them homes and education and enabled them to play a part in the economic life of our country. How can the Egyptians have left – Gaza, in 1956, was controlled by Egypt – these people abandoned like this?". And we are asking ourselves the same thing in 2024. It is the Palestinian people that need to stand up and seek to break out from these refugee camps and rebuild their lives, but if you continue to launch rockets and attacks, you will never rebuild your life, because Israel will respond. And this is the answer to the first question; never, and I mean never, will I regret having written a book on a great stateswoman, a book which gives me great pride. It was a book that took me a very long time even though it is fairly short, but I wanted to write it in a journalistic style, without notes, to make it more accessible. I won't stop with my book

presentations. I refuse to be intimidated because I respect those who attend, unlike those other people. If someone doesn't feel up to it, of course I understand. I hate the thought of giving in to those four cretins (sorry!). However, at a certain point I will carry on demonstrating and fight to present this book but, more than anything, stand up for civility and freedom. Because we are a democracy, and in a democracy I can think differently from you. That is the beautiful thing about democracy...

Certainly.

...but I would never go and protest about a book written by one of those two influencers who attacked mine. They have the right to present their book; I have the right to present mine. And if you don't like it? Then don't buy it!

Fiona Diwan

A newspaper in your letterbox. "So what?", you might think. And yet, not all newspapers are created equal. If it's the *Beth Magazine Bollettino*, the paper of the Jewish community in Milan, you might need to watch out. The worry is that someone in your apartment building, seeing the paper, might get some strange ideas or start to look at the recipient askance. The solution? Fiona Diwan, the editor of the *Bollettino*, had to resort to a piece of paper to completely mask the cover of the *Magazine* (with only the recipient's address visible) to preserve the anonymity of all her subscribers. This means of defence and protection recalls the horrific black and white images of an Italy full of informers and despicable cowards, gripped by an anti-Jewish, fascist frenzy. Except we are no longer in 1938, Benito Mussolini has been dead for some time now and today's fascists are anti-Semites who, in any way, place or form, threaten Italian citizens living peacefully simply because they are 'guilty' of being Jewish or reading the wrong kind of newspaper. And the people need to realise what's going on – this is the real drama.

This interview is taken from the episode of *Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti* on 18 March 2024.

Fiona Diwan is the editor of the *Bollettino*, which the Jewish community in Milan has been delivering to its subscribers for almost 80 years. This newspaper has a glorious and highly respected reputation but we are living in an age of madness. Just think: in 2024, in Milan, an inclusive and warm city, where everyone's rights are protected, there are some people who are excluded, have fewer rights and are regarded with much less warmth. And these are the Jews,

because the *Bollettino* is no longer sent out in transparent plastic or labelled packaging, but rather in anonymous envelopes because otherwise someone might try to seek out the subscribers. Fiona, firstly, good evening and welcome. Why have you had to take this decision? What happened?

Good evening and welcome to all the listeners. Look, there were lots of people who asked us to do this: after 7 October, many subscribers, registered with the Community and who have received the *Bollettino*, as you said, for decades (the paper started in 1945 and is the oldest in the Italian Jewish world), many of our readers told us that it had become awkward and difficult for them to have the *Beth Magazine Bollettino*, our newspaper, visible in their letterboxes. And this is because, since their porters or concierges were not always Italian – or rather Arabs or Muslims, to be precise, not that all are the same of course – they felt concerned. In some instances, the plastic had been opened and... in short, nasty experiences. They asked us (and we recognised the need for it) to hide the cover and the paper with a white sheet of paper. This is obviously very worrying: nothing like this has happened since 1945! But you should realise that Jews today feel under threat: during all these demonstrations, which have been dragging on for months, protesters have been shouting “Death to the Jews” in Arabic and no one says anything, no one stops them. They scream in Arabic and sometimes even in Italian; they burned an Israeli flag. So, let’s be honest here: people need to realise that there are Italian citizens, because we are Italian and our religion is Judaism, just as there are Waldensians, Buddhists and other religions... but we are Italian citizens and we are afraid that, in 2024, as you said, we are under threat. We have to trust that our compatriots will

stand with us, that they understand that we are in danger! One of our journalists, a few weeks ago, was forcibly removed from a protest. This journalist had gone there with a placard: “Peace in Israel, peace in Gaza” – surely not controversial in the least! Her placard was totally neutral and something I am sure everyone could agree with and yet she was removed. So, shall we discuss this phenomenon? Absolutely. That is what we are here for. There are 8,000 Jews in Milan, and our dear city has recently suffered the – terribly sad – resignation of Roberto Cenati, President of the Milan office of the ANPI (Italian National Association of Partisans) for 13 years, who objected to the word “genocide” being used to describe Israel by certain other members of the Milanese ANPI and, worse still, the resignation of Daniele Nahum who, at 41, after 15 years of activism for the Partito Democratico, had to give up his PD membership card. Because there is a total lack of clarity within the left today: failure to take action, silence, and this cannot be tolerated! And above all, I have an important point to make: we are Italian citizens, whose religion is Judaism. We do not vote in Israel (and therefore have no say in what goes on politically in Israel). Of course, we have a connection to Israel, just as Italians in Buenos Aires or New York have a connection to Italy, because there are ties of identity. However – I repeat – we are Italian citizens, we vote in elections in Italy and we therefore have the right to protection rather than finding our backs against the wall because of a war which is already in progress, a terrible war with deaths on both sides; just as there are huge numbers of people dead in Gaza (and I am not sure of the true numbers since the figures are provided by Hamas and I have some real doubts about their accuracy), there are also huge numbers of casualties on the Israeli side (and here again, the Israeli Ministry of Health reports 10,000

injured, young people in their twenties who have stepped on land mines and are now in Israeli hospitals missing arms and legs), as well as those who have perished. And I am sorry but war is awful on both sides: people have been killed, others are in mourning, just so much human tragedy. There are displaced persons in Israel as well as Gaza: what a shame that only one of the two sides, only half of this two-sided tragedy, is really taken into account.

But why is Hamas believed rather than Israel?

Because Israel has revived the age-old anti-Jewish prejudice that has existed in Europe for two thousand years and therefore, on the one hand, whatever was smouldering has now been brought to the surface; on the other, Israel is perceived as a white colonial state. At the moment, everything 'white' is stigmatised, so while there is some understandable desire to defend the oppressed, there is also great confusion about who is oppressing whom. Who are the oppressed and who the oppressors? Who decides? Is it the oppressors that react to a massacre or rather the oppressed? Are the people of Gaza, which has been free of Israelis for 15 years, oppressed or is it that the citizens of Gaza are oppressed by Hamas? What is the truth? In such a state of confusion, Hegel's words ring true: it is a night in which all cows are black. So, I would like to remind you all of something: there are 14 million Jews on Earth. 14 million! And 25,000 of them live in Italy. Twenty-five thousand. That's nothing. There are 2 billion, 100 million Muslims on the planet who hate the Jews and have decided that they should no longer be allowed to live here. The wiping of the Jews from the face of the Earth is in the founding charter of Hamas. This is an article in the Hamas founding charter. Is it any wonder that they have been classed

as a terrorist movement all over the world? So, why do people support them? People are swayed by a simple message, while such a complex situation is hard to understand. In general, people think of Israel as a usurper. The land which we now call Israel, which was once administered under a mandate of the British Empire and, earlier still, a province of the Ottoman Empire until 1916, in other words until the First World War, was home to both Arabs and Jews. Arabs and Jews: the land was shared. When the State of Israel was born in 1948 and the UN voted in November 1947 for the 'two states for two peoples' solution, the Arabs refused this coexistence because they decided – the Palestinians, who were not yet known as Palestinians at the time but rather Arabs from that area – that they did not wish to cohabit with the Jews, even though the latter had always been there. They have always been there. There are archaeological digs which reveal hidden articles every day dating back to ancient Israel, the Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of Judah. And those who insist on talking of colonisation surely cannot be referring to Israel, since the Jewish presence dates back three thousand years, long before the advent of Christianity. And archaeological findings are recovered every day, believe me, but people choose to ignore this because nowadays conformism – the worst of all social diseases – has crystallised around the idea that the Palestinians are the oppressed and the Jews, or Israelis, the oppressors. And this is despite the fact that the tiny number of Israelis and Jews is dwarfed by the 2 billion, 100 million Muslims and the fact that Islamic territory stretches from Morocco to Indonesia, while Israel is smaller than Lombardy. The Israelis are now perceived as on Goliath's side, while the Palestinians stand with David. But just stop and use your brain: this is wrong in both numerical and territorial terms.

Israel has one great advantage: technology. It is technology which has saved Israel from annihilation over the years because the *Iron Dome* has protected Israel from the missiles that rain down on its territory. It is the technological strength of Israel that has, until now, prevented its extinction. And unfortunately, this is part of the complexity I was referring to and what is happening there – in the Middle East – as something rooted in the European cultural fabric over two thousand years of not always peaceful relations between Christians and Jews is now increasingly penetrating into our collective awareness, reviving something which had lain dormant and which we had never truly addressed. I am talking about Italy, but perhaps this also applies to Europe. So, it is important to understand that this surge of antisemitism, this sense of threat which all of us feel in Italy, but also in France, Germany, England, Holland and across Europe, this sense of threat is due to the strong presence of Islam – at times radical – which creates a sort of ‘short circuit’ with this dormant European memory in which, in any case, the Jewish world is viewed with hostility. And this is what creates this ‘short circuit’ and our brutal awakening, one October morning, by a howling gale of antisemitism which, honestly, we had never expected to feel again since the Second World War. And we feel under threat: there is antisemitic graffiti on the streets of Milan, around the Central Synagogue. And we need to make sure that Lombards, Milanese and Italians are aware of these things. Because we are Jewish Italian citizens and it is vital to ensure – in a country that upholds civil rights – the same protection and same rights to all Italian citizens. And this is why, in the end, many feel in danger and have asked us to hide the cover of our newspaper with a white sheet because they are afraid of their neighbour, of the concierge, of being

threatened. And some of them will probably have experienced this at first hand. But let me tell you something interesting, just to make it clear: we also have readers (because we also have non-Jewish readers who have subscribed to the paper; we don't have a purely Jewish readership) who have said: “No, I don't want the white sheet, I want people to know. I have nothing to hide, I am what I am, I am proud to be Italian and proud to be Jewish. Where is the problem?”. And we have many readers who have asked us to remove the white sheet, because they have had a sudden change of heart, a resurgence of pride, telling us: “But why should we have to hide?”. As I said to you before: “Is it still 1938? No, it's 2024”. Understandably, the older people feel more afraid, while the younger readers have told us: “No, we don't want to receive the paper from the Jewish community in secrecy. Not on your life!”. So, some of our readers have rediscovered their sense of pride and we have received some passionate emails on the matter. Let me repeat: today's society is sick. Political polarisation is plain for all to see, with extremism on both sides... We are experiencing very difficult times and, as Bertolt Brecht said, “The problem of the Jews is never a Jewish problem: it is a problem of the others” because, when something happens to the Jews in a certain country, three minutes later everyone else will be affected. So, we must beware, because the Jews are like the canaries in the coal mine. If something should happen to them, the rest of the country will suffer the same fate three minutes later. We need a broader, more in-depth reflection on this phenomenon.

To conclude: the Jewish Brigade wasn't scheduled to march on 25 April⁷. Is that right? And amidst all this, the friendly and inclusive Mayor of Milan, Beppe Sala, spoke to you, asking you to do something for the taxpaying Milanese Jewish citizens?

Initially, like other Mayors, he was more reluctant. But recently, I must confess (and am delighted) that he has come out with some statements and taken a stronger position. When many people ask him to ban pro-Palestinian demonstrations such as that held on 8 March, which was screaming for vengeance (we marched to celebrate International Women's Day, on 8 March, and found ourselves in a sea of pro-Palestinian flags), this occupation of the city centre as soon as there is an event, with a flood of Palestinian flags, this is something the Mayor should ban. And then we are told that the Mayor does not have the power to ban such things – it's the Prefect. There is an issue of occupying city centres. If tomorrow you wanted to protest, for example, because there are not enough taxis, after an hour the Palestinian flags would start to appear; if I head into the city centre tomorrow to join a demonstration

⁷ The Jewish Brigade then marched through fierce protests in both Milan and Rome. In Milan, in particular, a group of Arab youths stabbed and injured a volunteer in the Brigade's security team. In Piazza Duomo, ANSA reported that pro-Palestinian activists had whistled the national anthem, the Mayor of Milan, Beppe Sala, the leaders of the ANPI (Italian National Association of Partisans) and the Brigade. For the director of Milan's Jewish Brigade Museum, Davide Romano: "There is obviously something wrong. And not just for our safety, which is under threat as never before. But for the 25 April as a whole, taken over by these fanatical and violent minorities. It was horrible to witness and I hope we never see it again". Taken from https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2024/04/26/brigata-ebraica-milano-25-aprile-egemonizzato-dai-violenti_20f2c978-7463-4db1-b59e-a4552497dd85.html

for pension reform (just as a hypothesis) or for an overhaul of the national health system, after an hour, I would find myself surrounded by Palestinian flags. There is a plan – at this point, I am certain of this – a plan to occupy city centres, a desire, an extreme need for visibility to impose a way of thinking. And so we are also worried about this and about how the authorities fail to understand and do nothing. Also because, today it is like this, but what about tomorrow?, what will we do tomorrow? We live with police vans in front of Jewish schools and synagogues. What kind of life is this? As Italian citizens, must we live under police protection throughout our lives and be afraid to send our children to the temple rather than to school? No, no, no! And this is why I personally, but also the Jewish institutions, invite the authorities to discuss this issue. Because we are – I repeat – Italians and have been for generations and centuries. Jews have been present in Italy for three thousand years. There were Jews in Italy during the life of Julius Caesar. We have evidence of this. So, what are we talking about? The authorities need to think of us, think not only of protection (because we are grateful for the protection they give us) but of preventing excessive and outrageous behaviour, such as the protesters we have unfortunately seen screaming "Death to the Jews!" in Arabic. And sometimes also in Italian. And this cannot happen. It simply cannot happen.

Are you Jewish? That's bad, very bad. I will criticise you, threaten you and abuse you as I see fit. But beware. We aren't talking about just anywhere, but the prestigious Harvard University, in the United States of America. In the cross-hairs and standing up by bringing a case which, at the time of publication, is still ongoing, is Alexander 'Shabbos' Kestenbaum, a young student who has decided to sue Harvard for failing to stop the discrimination against Jewish students. And it is sad to see that a university, a place of culture and learning, can become a hotbed of antisemitism where the friends we had yesterday have become our critics and enemies today. So, what should we do? Don't give up! And continue to fight for liberty and respect. Respect to Shabbos!

This interview is taken from the episode of *Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti* on 28 March 2024.

Q. My guest this evening is Shabbos Kestenbaum. A few days ago, I read about him in the latest edition of the weekly newspaper, *Newsweek*, which has one of the largest readerships in the States. Shabbos has taken the prestigious American university, Harvard, to court, but why?

A. We decided to explore legal avenues because Harvard never gave us the answers or adopted the measures we wanted. As Jewish students, we have the same rights as all students under federal law and the same policy adopted by the university; and, as things stand, we don't believe we are benefiting from these rights. We feel like we are being treated differently because of our religious identity and – as I said – if Harvard had wanted to put things right and listen to Jewish students, pledging to tackle antisemitism on the campus, then it would

have done so. But it didn't and so we have been forced to take the university to court.

Q. I read the essay you presented to the *Congressional Committee on Education & The Workforce* in the US Congress, which summarises all the problems you have faced at university. There was something I found terrifying. You wrote that there was both a 'before' and 'after' 7 October, but the scariest thing was on the night of 7 October because, when the news filtered through from Israel's southern border, about the Hamas attack, not one student group at Harvard wrote a statement in favour of the Israelis. In fact, 34 student groups drafted a document accusing Israel of having carried out the massacre itself. I find that incredible!

A. You're right. On the night of 7 October, 34 student groups condemned Israel for the atrocities, claiming that they were the fruit of what they defined as Israel's endless occupation of Gaza and the apartheid regime in Palestine. But the thing that really struck me was not the act of terrorism itself: sadly, as a Jew and someone with relatives in Israel, terrorism is an everyday occurrence. Obviously, not on the scale of the events of 7 October, but when I heard about the attack, I thought that sadly we are used to terrorism, we are used to this reality, to the fact that radical Muslim Jihadists murder and butcher innocent Jews. But this time was different: not just because of the scale of the attack, which is an existential problem⁸, but also because so many people, who we thought were our friends, who we thought were our allies, celebrated this massacre or blamed the Jews while it was still going on. There were very

⁸ An existential problem can be understood as: "a demonstration of how life is devoid of worth", in this case for the terrorists.

few (and certainly not at Harvard) who condemned Hamas. And it was intolerable to see my classmates exult in all this instead of decrying the perpetrators. And the university didn't punish anyone: for at least a couple of days, it was terrifying.

Q. I read that, when you walk across the campus at Harvard, people shout or chant at you, including things such as: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", that horrendous slogan which is also chanted by pro-Palestine students here in Italy. So, antisemitism is a global problem. In your testimony before congress, you revealed that your great-great-grandfather, the rabbi Yosif Breuer, was the most well-known and respected rabbi in Germany during the Weimar Republic and was imprisoned during Kristallnacht. Can you explain how antisemitism has become so widespread so quickly? It didn't start because they burned books in our town squares: it is like the 1930s all over again. How can we possibly be witnessing a second Kristallnacht?

A. Exactly. I mentioned my family who, like many other American Jews, have roots in Europe and especially Germany. My great-great-grandfather, Yosif Breuer, was a respected Orthodox Jewish rabbi and my great-great-aunt, his daughter, who is still alive, remembers when she was a girl how the Gestapo, the foot soldiers of the SS, came to her home and took her father away. Fortunately, they released him and he managed to escape from Germany with all his family. But my family history has always struck me because not only was I sure that such a thing would never happen again anywhere, but because Kristallnacht didn't start with the book burnings or mass deportations and arrests, no: Kristallnacht began because people started to accept, promote and apply an ideology where Jews were categorically different and inferior,

when they started to apply this double standard against the Jews. Obviously, I am not putting what is happening today on the same footing as the events of the past, especially such a horrific tragedy as the Holocaust, but I think we need to put things into perspective. If the insidious ideology of antisemitism is not fought and eradicated in somewhere such as Harvard, whose goal is to prepare the next generation of American leaders, then the future is dark indeed, not just as American Jews, but as Americans *tout court*. We cannot allow this type of hatred and discrimination to spread freely. This is what I told Congress and what I will continue to say. And no one will intimidate me.

Q. Why is antisemitism spreading around the world, especially in democratic countries? After 80 years of the Republic, Italy is a democratic country, while modern democracy was born in the US and UK. Why are these horrors happening in these countries? Can you explain it? Do you have an answer to this question?

A. This is the million-dollar question! I think there are people in a better position than me to answer that. But I do have two observations to make: firstly, Jews have suffered awful antisemitism for centuries, no matter what country they found themselves in. It didn't matter whether it was in the USA, or Israel or Europe: there have always been anti-Semites. There have always been those who wish to do harm to the Jewish people. I am a practising Jew. I believe in God and I believe that we are a special people and also that we have suffered great persecution. I would like to be able to explain it, to rationalise it all, but I cannot. I simply cannot explain it. In the higher-education institutions in the USA, often the most prestigious, someone who feels such awful hate should not have citizenship

rights. And yet, they do. And that is frightening. And to answer your question: I do not have an answer for you and that makes all of this terrifying. I do not have an answer. I think that some of these students must be ignorant. They cannot know that there are 2-3 million Israeli Arabs in Israel who enjoy the same rights as all other citizens; surely, they must be unaware of the great efforts the Israeli armed forces make to save the Gazans from being used as human shields by Hamas. I think the other students just do not know these things. And if they do, they don't care. And that is frightening.

Q. In a sense, your words echo those written in a book by an Italian Jewish author, Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor: If we don't learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. This is probably the only reasonable response to the antisemitism and anti-Zionism spreading across the world. But I don't think things will end up like in the 40s: now, we have the State of Israel.

A. Yes. And thank God for that. I think the reason why people must believe in the existence of a State of Israel is precisely the events of 7 October. Golda Meir, the first woman Prime Minister of Israel, said that the Jews' secret weapon was that they had nowhere else to go. And this is why we need friends in Italy, America and around the world who believe less in Israel's right to exist but rather in its obligation to defend itself and its Jewish, Muslim, Christian and all citizens from the barbaric terrorism of Hamas. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to talk to you because I believe, as Jews and pro-Israel Zionists, we need as many friends, sympathisers and allies as possible able to appreciate the existential crisis we Jews are facing, both in Israel and in the face of growing antisemitism around the world.

Q. I believe we should be grateful to those young men and women, aged 18-20, who fight day and night in the tunnels of Gaza. Because if they fall, if Israel falls, then it will be Europe's turn and then the West as a whole. And these are the facts.

R. Yes. This is a vital point: Israel is genuinely the last line of defence, especially in the Middle East, a region which is extremely chaotic and unstable. There is a need for a strong and democratic ally in the region and not so much for Israel or the Jews, but – as I said – for Western civilisation, Western values and liberal democracy. And if Israel falls, the whole West will follow. Iran is one of the major players in the area: the Houthis, Hezbollah... it is not just Israel that is at stake but so many key values we hold dear.

A. Coming back to your trial against Harvard. What's happening now? When do you think there will be a verdict?

R. We brought the case in January and unfortunately, we are going to update the case file tomorrow morning with other events that have occurred since the case first began. Harvard must respond by 14 April. We do not know how they will respond. They might ask for the case to be thrown out, they might choose to go to trial... we don't know and I don't want to guess. But the main deadline is 14 April, when Harvard will respond publicly to the case and then we will decide. However, I would invite all your listeners to read the case file we have published. Just search for *Kestenbaum Harvard lawsuit*⁹. It is available online and I feel anyone who reads it will find it hard not to feel a sense of moral indignation. I think it will be hard to close the file without believing that the problem is well-founded: Harvard has allowed antisemitism

⁹ The file can be viewed at <https://www.kasowitz.com/media/unxcn-vpo/harvard-complaint.pdf>

to take hold and has emboldened anti-Semites. I am sorry but this case needed to be brought.

Q. Shabbos, Israel has many friends around the world and I am honoured to be one myself. But I have one final question for you. And I would like to thank you so much for coming on the show and hope you will stay in touch. I don't know if you have seen anything in the American press like what I am about to discuss, but in Italy, for example, a school has declared a day's holiday on 10 April to mark the end of Ramadan. Italian history has been marked by 2,000 years of Catholicism and 2,500 years of Judaism, since the first Jews arrived in Rome 500 years before Christ. I feel we are slipping into a kind of crypto-Islamisation, just like in Michel Houellebecq's book, *Submission*. Why, in your view, is Europe acting so openly with respect to the Islamic idea of submission to Mohammed and to his religion?

A. I am not a political analyst, nor am I European, so it is difficult for me to discuss things which I have not prepared for. But I would like to stress two points: I am a Jew who loves studying history and I know that there are certain countries with more welcoming immigration policies and that these nations undoubtedly welcomed Jews and protected them from the Holocaust; at the same time, this does not mean that countries could or should open their borders to everyone. They can assess who is coming in, whether they support the values of the host country and respect its government; but I am not a European, nor a political analyst and I am not sure which policies or rules should be applied. There is certainly a risk of radical Islamic terrorism: Israel is confronted by this every day, from Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. And so, I would be very careful.

Alon Bar, formerly the Israeli Ambassador to Italy and San Marino

Alon Bar, 66 years old, an Israeli diplomat. Born in the kibbutz of Sasa, in Upper Galilee, into a family of directors and actors, he graduated from Saint Lewis Park High School in Minneapolis, USA, in 1975. After his military service, from 1975 until 1979, he studied at the Jewish University of Jerusalem, graduating in International Relations and Training in 1984. A diplomat since the eighties, married with three children, Bar has been all over the world, from Guatemala to Spain, before working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem. He has dealt with Egypt and arms control, headed the political office of the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, been appointed Vice Director General for Strategic Affairs, then Ambassador to Spain, handled relations with the United Nations and much more besides. In September 2022, he was appointed to represent the State of Israel in Italy and San Marino. He enjoys cooking and his wife is an artist. And he is in love with Italy, even though he stepped down from his post on 31 July 2024.

This interview is taken from the episode of *Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti* on 04 April 2024.

Q. This evening, I am delighted to welcome the Israeli Ambassador to Italy and San Marino, Alon Bar, who will answer a few questions and help us take a look at the international situation and, above all, the situation in our country. Excellency, firstly, thank you so much for your time. I have a question for you. Why do you think that antisemitism is sweeping not only Europe but also Italy? Why is it becoming so widespread?

A. Firstly, I am delighted to be a guest on your programme. To answer your question: I am not sure I am qualified to explain antisemitism, whether historical or current, which, in some cases, is intermingled with the demonisation of Israel, the objection to Israel's right to exist or to respond to the rockets launched against it. It is a mix of ignorance and Jewish stereotypes and is also – amongst leftists or minorities – an attempt to foment and engage in hatred against Israel and, lastly, all those associated with Israel, first and foremost the Jews. However, again, it is an anti-Semite that should explain what antisemitism is, not me.

Q. Last week, I interviewed a young student who attends the University of Harvard. His name is Shabbos Kestenbaum and his great-great-grandfather was one of the most influential rabbis in Germany during the 1930s, who survived Kristallnacht and fled to America. His great-great-grandson, Shabbos, is now suing Harvard, accusing it of antisemitism. And this makes me think. In your view, why are institutions such as universities allowing protests against Israel but doing nothing against hatred for the Jews and against all Jewish students attending universities in America and Italy? Why?

A. I think that this is the result of a general crisis, of the inability of universities and academic institutions to involve students in creating an atmosphere that fosters free and open discussion of these matters. Students want to listen to reasons that support the position they have adopted; they are not interested in hearing other opinions that conflict with their own. With lightning speed, and with no efforts to attempt to grasp the complexity of the issues, many of them side with the parties they consider the weakest and thus

we see crazy situations where there are young students – in some cases also homosexuals or members of the LGBTQ+ community – who support the Islamic extremists of Hamas. And in reality, Hamas murders and exterminates those with a different sexual orientation. I find it absurd that these people will support Iran, which prevents women from walking unaccompanied, that they seem happy to support Syria or ISIS, but none of them even try to explain the complexity of the situation in Israel. This is a terrible thing for the academic world and for society as a whole. We need to change this attitude if we want our society to remain democratic and to continue to offer protection to minorities. We must remember what happened in Italy, during the fascist regime and the racial laws, when it was illegal to express different opinions and only one way of thinking was supported – the only one that could be expressed in public. Now, I am not saying that this is the situation currently in Italy. It's different, of course, but we must be very careful about this one-way censorship of thought, which is particularly dangerous for young people, who may be uninformed or adopt strong positions on issues which they do not understand. In addition, academic institutions – such as the Academic Senate and their ilk – are afraid to talk to them.

Q. Exactly. Excellency, earlier, when you were talking about the LGBTQ+ movement or feminists, I was thinking about how it amazes every time when women born and brought up in the Western world, with its human and civil rights and freedoms, march through the streets shouting: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”. Don't they know how Hamas treats women? Is the LGBTQ+ world aware of how Hamas treats them? They must have no idea.

A. The problem is that they don't really care enough. The people who do not want to know or learn about the ideology of Hamas and its Constitution are those who believe we should sign a ceasefire with Hamas. The ideology of Hamas is the extermination of Israel: they want to kill us, not to live alongside us. You referred to the slogan "From the river to the sea". Or when they talk of "occupation", they are talking about Israel. They are against the existence of the State of Israel and they want to kill the Israeli people – and obviously Jews all over the world, but especially in Israel – to achieve their goal. I think they want to believe in all this because the images from Gaza are absolutely horrendous, but the point is that if you want to see photos of peaceful coexistence – including with Palestinians – in the region, as long as Hamas remains in control of the Gaza Strip and maintains its grip over Palestinian society, the possibility of long-term agreements or talk of stability is nil, because Hamas' aim is the destruction of Israel. It cooperates with Iran and other terrorist organisations in our region to permanently destabilise the situation and marching for them means supporting conflict and the murder of Jews, Arabs and Christians.

Q. Excellency, I know you have to be careful with what you say, but I would like to highlight something. Among those calling for a ceasefire in Gaza is the Pope himself. This seems to equate the position of Israel with that of Hamas. Isn't this a little embarrassing for the Vatican?

A. I would like to talk about Israel's position, not that of the Vatican. I understand those calling for a ceasefire; I would like to see one myself. We do not want war. We do not relish images of war and fighting and my heart goes out to all the innocent victims – including the Palestinians. But you need

two parties for a ceasefire and not just one. We are fighting a terrorist organisation in Gaza, and when the UN Security Council approved a resolution calling for a ceasefire, Hamas referred to it as "great news" and immediately launched rockets against Israel. It is Hamas which has, several times, refused an invitation to agree on a ceasefire permitting the end of their people's suffering, humanitarian aid and an end to the clashes and victims. The condition? The immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages. And they refused several times. They want to rebuild their military capabilities and restore control over the Gaza Strip, with the aim of launching another attack like 7 October. Let me repeat: we are not against a ceasefire and we understand the calls for one but in order for there to be a ceasefire, Hamas needs to agree and it does not wish to. I swear that I have nothing, absolutely nothing, against the people calling for a ceasefire. I want one just as much as anyone else. The fact that this war is dragging on is terrible for us and terrible for everyone. But to achieve this, Hamas must stop fighting and release the hostages and we need to find a way of ensuring that Hamas will stop using the Gaza Strip to launch attacks against Israel.

Q. Absolutely. Today, in the Italian newspapers such as *La Stampa* or *La Repubblica*, there are articles and interviews with professors from a handful of universities – such as the Politecnico of Turin – who are saying: "look, we need to boycott agreements with Israel because some of the technologies that we might collaborate on could be dual-use – they could also be employed for military purposes. Is this a sort of intellectual hypocrisy on the part of certain Italian universities, who are exploiting this argument to mask antisemitism?"

A. I think the people trying to do this are not concerned with the dual-use aspect, but wish to support the boycotting of any operation with academic institutions in Israel. I repeat: this is something which people do not know about. These people don't ask to do the same thing and put an end to relationships of cooperation with the academic authorities in Russian, China, Iran or anywhere else in the world: just with Israel. So, I think that the intention of this behaviour is clear, harmful both for the interests of the universities and of academic institutions in general. I think that few people in Italy know that university cooperation, in Israel, is neither coordinated by, nor the responsibility of, the government, because the aim is to share knowledge and foster cooperation between universities and intellectual communities. And I think it is to the benefit of the Italian people and to humanity that we should continue to work together in this field. Let me reiterate this: in my opinion, the dual-use argument is only used by those who wish to boycott any cooperation with Israel whatsoever and so I do not believe their justifications.

Q. And also, in your presentation video at the start of your mandate, which can be viewed on the Embassy website, you talked about cooperation between Israel and Italy in terms of global warming, water shortages, food and energy safety. These don't look like dual-use agreements to me.

A. This is a great example of the fruitful cooperation between Israel and Italy, which contributes to both countries' capacity to tackle the challenges you have just listed. And all the more so when we are talking about energy, water, etc. Once again, when you observe those requesting a certain type of agreement or who are against any agreements with Israel, try and see whether they have ever said anything

against cooperating with other countries. We are the only country against which these restrictions are called for: this is anti-Israel discrimination. Whether it is motivated by antisemitism or anything else, I don't know, but I do not think we should accept this view. And I am delighted to see that many people in the academic world, and at national level, between regional authorities, want to continue to uphold these agreements to cooperate with Israel on matters of mutual interest.

Q. But do you feel that the relationship between Israel and Italy has been damaged or do you still consider us a friend?

A. I don't think our relationship is over. There is still a huge amount of cooperation and dialogue between our countries that also includes some, in Italy in general and also in some cases in the government, who have been critical towards Israel. I don't believe that criticism between our two countries – when delivered in a spirit of friendship, as is the case between Italy and Israel – should be considered as the breakdown of a relationship. I think that there are some people, in Italy, who make a great deal of noise against any type of cooperation with Israel and accuse us of killing people deliberately, which is absolute nonsense. And I would invite the decision makers in Italy to continue to listen – and I think there are many people (probably the majority) – who will not accept this type of boycotting, nor be intimidated by small groups of students or people who talk a great deal, without necessarily expressing the will of Italians or – in this case, not in the slightest – that of those with the powers to take decisions in Italy.

Celeste Vichi

Q. Thank you again for your time. I do have one final question: do you think that Israel might join the European Union one day? We are hearing a lot nowadays about the admission of Ukraine, so why not Israel, too?

A. Israel is one of the closest friends of the EU even though it is not an actual member. We have adopted many of your legal standards. We are part of the EU's economic and research cooperation systems. We are part of the EU at a social, economic and cultural level. As regards official admission to the EU, we will need to see if it is in the interests of Israel or of the rest of the Union. I don't think it would be possible at the moment, but I do believe that closer cooperation and dialogue between the EU and Israel are crucial, and I must say that I am sorry to see the current High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Joseph Borrell, damaging the opportunities for expanding dialogue and cooperation between and the EU. There are various ways of conducting this dialogue. I feel that he is currently expressing the minority position of the European countries, or perhaps only his own – in other words, highly critical of and aggressive towards Israel. And I hope that, after the European elections, there will be a new High Commissioner who can better reflect the dialogue and past cooperation between us and the EU.

Q. Certainly. Thank you for your time, Excellency and *Am Israel chai!*

A. Thank you so much! Thank you for the opportunity. It was my pleasure.

A lawyer from Tuscany, Celeste Vichi, is the President of the Union of Italy/Israel Associations. Her love for Israel developed in school through an unforgettable teacher. And she has chosen to stand up and defend Israel against today's ever-cruder and more insidious hatred and antisemitism, which exploded with unimaginable violence after 7 October. It is absurd how the West, how women just like Celeste – born and raised in freedom and among Western rights – should support Hamas, with their cries of *Free Gaza*. No! Gaza shall not be free while the cutthroats backed by Iran continue to act without any respect for the weakest – especially children – who are used as human shields against Israel. And that's not all: Europe has become increasingly marginal with regard to an issue that should be of paramount importance and interest to the entire Union. And yet Celeste, with her pale blue eyes, hopes to see a different tomorrow, better for everyone, in the Middle East and, subsequently, also for us. This interview was recorded on 24 June 2024.

Celeste Vichi is President of the Union of Italy/Israel Associations and I would like to thank her for her time. What was it that brought Israel so close to your heart?

My love for Israel started a long time ago. My interest in Judaism began at primary school, thanks to a fantastic teacher who would make us read passages from the *Diary of Anna Frank*. I remember being stunned at the time. I simply couldn't understand the reasons for such hatred, for the Holocaust, the persecutions, the racial laws. I just couldn't explain it: and trying to find reasons for something totally senseless is a goal we then pursue throughout our lives,

including as adults. Hence, my interest not only in the Jewish people but also in the Jewish state, because supporting Israel today means supporting the principle of civilisation in the Western world.

And over time, this interest has turned into a genuine fascination and a real sense of belonging, of an intellectual alliance: Israel represents a piece of us, of Western society in the Middle-Eastern world and is thus perceived as an irritation confronted and surrounded by theocracies, autocracies, military dictatorships, oligarchies and much more. And understanding this stark contrast forces us to adopt – including morally – a definite position, especially at the moment. This love arose from an attempt to find an explanation for the Holocaust. But over time, by studying and reading, you understand that some phenomena are social and are born – I am talking of antisemitism – when politics is unable to provide real, concrete and precise answers to people. The tendency is thus to look for a scapegoat and to establish a collective guilt in a people, in what is different and therefore hold them responsible for the economic crisis, but also for Covid, etc. Every conspiracy theory always leads to blaming the Jews and whoever is considered different. But then, Jews are both equal and different in our society, because who is able to identify and understand who is Jewish, considering that they are just like us? And so, this creates even greater suspicion and a widespread feeling of hatred and prejudice towards the ‘others’.

While you were talking about anti-Jewish prejudice, I was thinking that such a speech could easily have been made in 1905 – and I don’t say 1905 randomly, because that was the year when the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared, that

infamous and fabricated work which some still believe to be true – or in 1938. So, let me ask you: how dangerous – as well as difficult – is it to be Jewish at the moment?

Let me start by stating that I am not Jewish myself but, through my role, we have made the decision to give our support to the Jewish state. So, yes, it is very difficult today, especially after 7 October, to be Jewish: we see this in what happens in universities. You mentioned 1938, which was the year when the racial laws were approved, including in my town of San Rossore (in the Province of Pisa). Today, we are facing the same situation; just think of all the universities which have witnessed protests: Turin, Milan, Pisa, Rome... so many. We are witnessing the boycotting of Israeli universities and this is very serious indeed because, apart from the fact that Israeli universities are places where liberty and freedom of thought are cultivated, it is shocking that some are seeking to shut down scientific cooperation in such places, which should be temples of freedom of thought, discussion and debate. By doing so, we are shutting the door on any form of openness. And the fact that this is happening in universities is worse still. I am in contact with Jewish students who are currently afraid of revealing their identity in those very universities, which should be some of the safest places for them to be. Unfortunately, it feels as though someone is financing all these people who have occupied our universities. I am referring to the fact that we know financial backing to many universities, and not just in Italy, has been provided by Iran, Qatar, etc. This is a global phenomenon and we have seen how rogue states just as those I just mentioned are seeking to infiltrate the intellectual class of our society and nerve centres such as universities. This doesn’t happen by chance and should give us all pause.

Celeste, there is a question that has troubled me since the outbreak of this war, and this is the fact that so many women who were born and raised in the West, among Western freedoms and rights – why, if your partner were now to arrive and say to you: “Shut up, you must obey me!”, the first thing you would do is give him a slap and then then tell him to get lost – so why are there women who enjoy, in the West, the freedom to do whatever they want with their lives (although there is still some work to be done: I am thinking of the difference in pay between a man and a woman, but this is something that can be resolved)... why are there women who demonstrate loudly against Israel and classify it is a genocidal State, all the while chanting *From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free?*¹⁰ How can these people support a movement such as Hamas, in which the role of a woman is horizontal, to make babies, and vertical, to sweep the house? How?

I am always asking myself the same thing: firstly, we are facing a double standard, which is applied to Israel but also to Jews when facing identical situations. Just consider 7 October: women were raped, massacred, mutilated and no one – and I mean no one – in the main international feminist organisations, such as the #MeToo movement, said a word. #MeToo unless you're a Jew. This silence was frightening. There are protests for women's rights all over the world; however, if they are Jewish or Israeli, it's fine to overlook this. This makes it clear that being on the side of Israel means being on the side of women and of the civil rights that distinguish us. And today, indeed, we are confronted by Islamist ideology which, thanks to the current huge waves of migrants, is taking hold

¹⁰ From the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea.

more and more and making signs of submission such as the veil more acceptable. Come on! I am liberal and I do not believe that the solution is either imposition or prohibition because we should have freedom of choice. However, I do think we need to take action to acknowledge our Western culture. To make it clear that, behind a simple veil lies a symbol of submission and a patriarchal view of women, used solely for reproductive purposes and not for the contribution they can make to society. In the Islamic world, women do not have a social or political role or one in the labour force. It is a part of the world which refuses to allow the female half of the population to participate in society. And this is also being imported into our countries, which, as a woman, I find very concerning. Let me give you an example: yesterday, I was in a shop and I saw a girl aged about 10 or 11, completely covered, who was playing with her brothers, dressed in shorts and T-shirts. Our society has reached a point where we must accept this and I wonder where our social antibodies are. Is this not a form of child abuse? Where is the respect for liberty? I wonder where the teachers are. Can't they say something? When someone sees a girl arrive at school covered up like that, how are they supposed to interact? We must recover that strong and powerful sense of the values of our Western civilisation, hard won over many centuries. Women have not yet achieved equality in terms of both salary and division of labour within the home, as you were saying. There is still much to do; however, the process will be seriously jeopardised by this huge Muslim immigration. This is sadly the harsh reality and the West needs to be aware of this, because through women, the force of demography and the birth rate, Islamic society will become more and more dominant in our countries.

Certainly. Do you see a solution to the problem in the Middle East? Are two states a possibility? Even if the recognition of a State which does not yet exist, namely Palestine, will enrage Israel because, in essence, this would be a reward for the terrorists of Hamas...

Listen, the situation – as I have always said – is that, first and foremost, we need a serious partner. Who exactly should Israel open talks with – with those terrorists in Hamas? We need to ask ourselves: Is Hamas genuinely politically viable? Before doing this interview, I read a poll by the Palestinian Centre for Research and polls which says that 96% of Palestinians deny the massacre of 7 October: “66% expressed support for the 7 October attack against Israel and over 90% stated that the Hamas terrorists did not commit any atrocities against Israeli civilians”. What can we say when we see such figures? There is not much to add: we are faced by a contiguity – in a certain sense – between the Palestinian people and the Hamas terror attack. Hamas which, again according to this study, if there were free elections, would be re-elected in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. How can you talk with a terrorist organisation seeking the destruction of Israel? In any case, the Palestinians have had several chances to achieve recognition of their State in the past: in 2000, with the Oslo Accords; in 2009, with Ehud Barak... these are the best known, I think. And it all started back in 1948 with the creation of the Jewish State. The Palestinians were opposed at the time because their ideology was, and remains today, the eradication of the Jewish State and the denial of its right to exist. You said it yourself before: “*From the river to the sea Palestine will be free*” means that there should be nothing between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea and for as long as this is their stance, it will be extremely hard

to achieve the two states for two peoples solution. Moreover, this presupposes not only the complete demilitarisation of Gaza, but also – and no one says this – the fact that Israel is forced to fight on several fronts. For example, since 7 October, Hezbollah has launched an incredible number of rockets from the Lebanese border, around 2,000 in almost 260 days: an average of 8 per day, with a peak of up to 200 in mid-May. The problem here is the role that the UN should have in all of this. The talk used to be of double standards when it came to women, but the same also applies with respect to the Jewish State as, since 7 October, the UN has done everything to legitimise anyone who has attempted to delegitimise Israel. The UN has done everything to hide the truth. While the Gaza problem is the subject of discussions, the Secretary General, Antonio Guterrez, has not said a word about what is happening in the north, in Lebanon (with 60,000 Israelis displaced and forced to leave their homes). So this is the first problem we face: Guterrez. Some years ago, in 2006, the UN adopted resolution 1710, which called for the demilitarisation of the border with Lebanon. While it is true that Unifil forces are present there, Hezbollah has done nothing ever since except increase its forces and bolster its arsenal, to the extent that – if I am not mistaken – there are at least 100,000 devices which are still trained on Israel as we speak. I was at the border a year and a half ago, before the war. There are Unifil forces there, but they seem to be engaged more in bird watching than acting as a peacekeeping force; in this scenario, at the moment, I find the two states for two peoples solution, though wonderful, extremely hard to achieve as things stand.

And what about Europe in all this?

(She laughs.) Europe's role is strictly minor. I appreciated the words of our Prime Minister at the G7 when, interviewed on this point, she stressed the importance of never forgetting who started the war. This is a vital thing which Guterrez fails to do and this reminder was essential. Europe today is lazy: on the one hand, it – rightly – backs Ukraine, but on the other it seems to have completely forgotten Israel. And let's not forget that the battles we are fighting today are wars between democracies and autocracies and that the war in Ukraine is emblematic of this aspect. Europe will always be of lesser importance because the arenas in which the greatest aspects of international politics are at stake are now elsewhere; I am thinking of the BRICS countries, which are becoming increasingly important and are supported by Vladimir Putin. Let us put it like this: these events have left Europe a pale reflection of itself.

What about Italy? I know you are doing everything you can for a law...

For some years now, our association has championed the adoption of the definition of antisemitism as drawn up by the IHRA¹¹ in our legal system. We have prepared a definition and brought it to the local and regional councils. We are now working towards its adoption in a legal text, since we feel that the acceptance of such a law is the only tool genuinely able

¹¹ *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, an intergovernmental organisation, founded in 1998, which unites governments to advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance worldwide and to uphold the commitments of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum. The IHRA currently has 34 member countries, including Italy.

to clamp down on the growing antisemitism. This definition is particularly important since, in addition to stigmatising both the more traditional, classic antisemitism (I am thinking about stereotypes of Jews with long noses, for example), it combats Holocaust denial and reductionism (which are signs of antisemitism). But this definition is a step forward, because it considers anti-Zionism equivalent to antisemitism, and anti-Zionism is the denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist: this is the new, more advanced, frontier of antisemitism and this is why it must be included within the text of a law. This definition reaffirms Israel's right to exist and – I wish to add, after 7 October and the ideological attempts to justify all of this – also to defend itself. This will make it possible to eliminate this sentiment from our universities and I would also like to thank the Lega, which was the first of our political parties to bring a draft law before the Senate which, we hope, will be allocated time for discussion and embraced by our political forces. Because the fight against antisemitism needs to cut across all our political forces. Identifying with this definition will, we hope, become a shared value. Thank you to the Lega, which stepped up to be the first advocate of this application.

In conclusion, given that the situation in the Middle East is seemingly never-ending, how will there be an end to the war?

This is a difficult question, since this is what I was saying to you earlier: firstly, we should never forget that there are still about a hundred hostages in the hands of Hamas and that around forty have allegedly died while in captivity. We should never forget that Israel still has 100 people in the hands of Hamas. The end of the war requires, first of all, the return of

all the hostages, who, once freed, have revealed cases of rape, violence and the most awful things you can imagine. Firstly, we need to ensure the return of the hostages and to guarantee the safety of Israel. And let us be clear: Israel cannot allow itself to have unsafe borders and Israelis will never permit another 7 October. While it is hard to make predictions about a peace accord with the Palestinians, one thing is certain: at this point, Jerusalem will never permit any further violations of its territory and especially that its people, our citizens, should suffer another massacre like 7 October. This is the only thing I am sure of.

And it is a certainty that we should all support. *Am Israel Chai!*

Am Israel Chai! Israel lives and will always live, thankfully. Just one final thing: people talk a lot about Israel without really knowing much about it. Israel is a young country, in which we love life, and the young people today at the front do not wish to be fighting in Gaza or Lebanon. The majority of our population is aged under 30 and they have lots of children. Israel is ranked fifth in the world – despite the war – in terms of level of satisfaction and joy of life. This shows the fundamental and moral role the country plays for the Jewish people, since it is the only place where these people can live when our countries might see the recurrence of antisemitism. Because today's antisemitism is taking a new form, anti-Zionism: preventing the Jewish people from having their State is the new antisemitism. Failure to fully grasp this means failure to understand what is actually happening.

Anna Cinzia Bonfrisco

Persona non grata. An unenviable title but, if used against you by Iran, the country which hates Israel more than anything else in the world and calls it merely the 'Zionist entity' without even pronouncing its name, it is more like a badge of honour. Anna Cinzia Bonfrisco is a high-level politician, even forming part of the delegation which liaised with Tel Aviv. She has always been on Israel's side, upholding its right to exist and legitimacy and always speaking out in favour of the Jewish. And she was one of those who most encouraged me to write this book. What follows is the interview she gave to me in July 2024.

The former MEP, Anna Cinzia Bonfrisco, holds an enviable record: she is considered undesirable in Iran, because she always takes Israel's side, to such an extent that, when she served in the European Parliament, she was a member of the delegation which maintained relations between the European Union and Israel. Why have you chosen to stand with Israel, Anna?

Because Israel is part of our cultural, historical and political roots, right? If we define democracy as the most crucial asset we have in liberal political democracies. Israel is a liberal democracy (and often very similar to Italy, with all its advantages and flaws) and simply must form an integral part of the living fabric of the European constituency through its history, culture and also the Jewish religion, because what unites us is this knot of Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman roots which created the most important way of thinking in the world, the philosophy that inspires the West and which is currently experiencing a crisis in which, however, it is the

borders of Israel which are most under attack and vulnerable since it is surrounded by enemies, first and foremost Iran. Standing with Israel means standing with European citizens, their roots, their history and – let us hope – their future. A future in which an awareness of what we are and why we are how we are is a foundation of our coexistence and, therefore, our fraternity with the Jewish people and with Israel.

However, one of the things that emerges from the interviews I conducted for this book, is that people are afraid to be Jewish or pro-Israel in Europe today. Why is this?

Because this is one of the cornerstones of the current crisis. We are experiencing a crisis that is above all cultural, even more than political. This cultural crisis is the result of years of insidious attacks and disinformation. This disinformation represents genuine interference in European states. Antisemitism has been defined by the European Parliament by virtue of an amendment submitted by my Lega colleagues as a “form of interference”. Just like the actions of Qatar with Qatargate. Those who support and foment antisemitism are seeking to destabilise our model of society, a model founded on our history, identity and culture. And also in religious roots. And those who make others afraid of defending Israel are actually attacking the security of Israel itself; those who subscribe to the malicious and wicked narrative of political Islam (when radical Islam becomes political and you read about ‘their’ state of law) are not only participating in a form of interference but also feeding the insecurity in our own country. I will just take the most recent example of the two huge demonstrations in Berlin which saw Islamic spokespersons standing for political office in our Europe asking for recognition of *Sharia* law. In fact, we know that,

for example in Paris, there are districts which the police no longer enter and leave to their own devices for the management of security and justice in accordance with *Sharia*. If such things then move from France to Germany, it will very shortly become a problem for every Member State. Now, I think that this is one of the deepest reasons for the huge consensus achieved by Marine Le Pen, firstly in the European elections and then in the first round of the French parliamentary elections, because the French perceive all of this as a form of insecurity and an attack on their society, on their country. And if the citizens feel this, why not the leading institutions in Europe? Because Europe – instead of defending its roots alongside Israel – has gone along with the narrative whereby women covered with a veil walking through the streets are actually supported by European principles and projects though we know full well that this is an unacceptable form of submission. But one step at a time, one day at a time, everything becomes acceptable, including the hatred for Jews simply because they are Jews. Not because they are Israelis.

Right. And this results in denying the legitimacy of the State of Israel. There are two points I would like to note here. Firstly, before and after matches during the Euro, there is a UEFA advert with the hashtag #footballAll, with a girl wearing a veil who is refereeing. Am I really supposed to believe that a Muslim girl with a veil would be allowed to become a referee? Secondly, during *Gay Pride* in Milan, I was stunned to say some of the participants waving a Palestinian flag in the form of a rainbow. But do they know what Hamas does to LGBT people or do they genuinely believe that Israel is a racist country?

I think we have already seen the most serious thing, which was when our universities decided to bar Israel from university cooperation schemes. We are talking of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of culture, science, research and technology. The fact that such a thing could occur at *Gay Pride* worries me. It actually makes me laugh, it is so ridiculous. However, the pro-Hamas assemblies organised in our universities are nothing to laugh about. And, for those like us, who are perhaps a little older, this is strongly reminiscent of the tolerance exhibited towards other phenomena, which are all-too similar: radical ideological and religious phenomena such as what we saw on 7 October, without a doubt, but perhaps also earlier.

When darkness envelopes our halls of learning, we face an ugly time of maximum danger. Four idiots waving a rainbow flag without remotely understanding what happens to those in Gaza with rights – not just LGBT, but also women, the disabled and all sorts of vulnerable people – crushed by Islamic extremism. Because there is violence within these principles: they are born violent. In my view, there is no non-violent interpretation of the Koran. It is always violent. And this should really give us pause at a period such as this when, unavoidably, we are forced to deal with previously unparalleled levels of migration. And in all likelihood, we will not be able to stop this, but we can stop the erosion of our values and principles. We must! Those of us living in this European context, born on the rubble of a war in which, not coincidentally, the Jews were tragic protagonists as victims of Nazism, the racial laws, etc.... this is precisely what we must defend – no ifs or buts – against anyone who represents a risk for the hard-won rights enjoyed by the most vulnerable in society. Our freedom; women's freedom; everybody's

freedom to live safely in their country with no one dreaming to demand the recognition of a legal system which is not our own. Those who come here are welcome, provided they are aligned with our system of values and principles. There are other aspects of migration which we might discuss but, in principle, anyone is welcome provided that they respect our history and do not seek to call it into question by demanding the recognition of laws different from our own and different from the state of law which cost us so much to build.

And linked to this, I have a question which has just popped into my mind: why has there been such a frightening explosion of antisemitism since 7 October? There seems to be a sort of self-destructiveness in Europe, amid self-congratulatory calls for a peaceful resolution in the arms of the most politicised and violent Islam. It is as if we are saying “I don't care. I want you to destroy me. I want you to subjugate me”. There is no thought of saying “no, no, no! I will defend Israel because, if Israel falls, we will be next”. Are Molenbeek and the French *banlieues* the Trojan horse of the West? Was Oriana Fallaci right when she talked of ‘Eurabia’? Is this why Europe is crying out for subjugation, with us hearing more about Ramadan in Italy this year than Easter? They even want holidays for Ramadan...

(Sighs.)

That sigh says it all...

Is the West finished? I hope not. We are certainly facing a crisis because we are victims of disinformation which we should reject but instead grows more prevalent by the day. It seems to me that there is a sort of ‘conspiracy’ between

diverse interests that see Europe as the battlefield.

We created Europe – as Simone Veil¹² said – on the understanding that we would never forget it was built on the ruins of a terrible war. It is as if an external figure had predetermined, hypothesised and then constructed, almost at the same time, the conditions for Europe's return to a stage of war. Europe has lived in peace, without worrying about defence, for many years. It seems a little late to be talking about this now, but I hope we will abandon this pacifism which had made us the most vulnerable people in the world due to our lack of defence systems. And this is highlighted by the fact that the sooner we understand that someone has planned for us to be easily conquered and subjugated, the sooner we will get organised and defend our liberal values tooth and claw.

This is something we agree on. And my next questions seems particularly apposite: Schumann, De Gasperi... the Europe they wanted was based on a Judaeo-Christian culture. This couldn't be ignored or put aside. Just as this mass influx from the Islamic world should not be ignored. So, what should Europe now do to manage this migration? You should remember what it cost in economic terms and in human lives to be able to guarantee this Europe as a market, as an economic system. It now needs to become a political

¹² Simone Veil (1927-2017), a Jew, was deported to Auschwitz. After the war, she became a lawyer and was then appointed Minister of Health in 1974, before finally being elected as an MEP and the first President of the European Parliament from 1979 to 1982. A French academic, she was involved in politics until the 2010s and was also a member of the Constitutional Council. Her name is included among those in the Giardino dei Giusti di tutto il mondo in Milan.

system and in politics, it is necessary to choose the visions of politics and society that European citizens consider most suitable in this historic time. I can see the great demand, from European citizens, for clear – and perhaps also strong – policies in defence of European history to guarantee its future, not as a Europe fooled by fabrications and disinformation which misrepresent the historical meaning of things, as is the case with events in Palestine. I was saying that I am not sure whether seeing such a flag at Gay Pride makes me laugh or cry but, in the end, it does not really upset me. What disturbs me much more is that those who attend our academic institutions should understand their history and be able to recognise the distinction, when we talk of this 'two states for two people' political formula, which seems merely a stopgap solution, since there are not two people and there cannot be two states. There is a melting pot of religions there and coexistence is certainly possible but, for many years, some have been striving to prevent it; not by chance were the attacks of 7 October carried out on the eve of the signature of one of the most important of the great Abraham Accords. Because when the Arab system – Arab, let me reiterate that – in all its complexity and with all its (occasionally marked) differences was ready to sit down with Israel to guarantee conditions of peace and development... there was one party which was not willing to accept this. And moreover, which country has spread terrorism there? It is Iran. And we have let them do so in accordance with the flawed foreign policy adopted both by the European Union and by many of its Member States, including Italy (in the past), by virtue of some vague economic interest which does not seem remotely sufficient to justify such a misguided policy. I remember very

clearly Ms Mogherini¹³ going to Iran and putting on a veil to be received by the Iranian authorities.

I also remember the covering up of the statues¹⁴.

Certainly. I can remember another detail from parliamentary life at the time, when it was only through the strength of certain parliamentary groups – including the one I headed at the time – that we stopped the Iranian authorities from entering the Italian parliament. And they were then redirected to the Capitoline Museums and the statues were covered – a shameful act which only those with no sense of their own history and roots could commit. And it is no coincidence that these people are almost always from the left: in France, in Italy and in other countries.

All the more reason now for speaking to you now as a woman, instead of a politician. I have seen women born and raised in the freedoms and rights of the West who have joined in demonstrations, singing “*From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*”, applauding for Palestine and

¹³ Federica Mogherini (1973 -), formerly Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2014 (Renzi government), from 2014 to 2019, she was the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs (Juncker Commission). She is now the Rector of the College of Europe in Warsaw.

¹⁴ During a state visit to Rome in January 2016, the Iranian President, Hassan Rohani, was invited to visit the Capitoline Museums in Rome. As a measure of ‘respect’, the then Minister for Cultural Affairs, Dario Franceschini (Renzi government), had the nude statues from classical antiquity covered up. There was a huge controversy. All Rohani said (ANSA, 27 January 2016, 14:27) was that this was: “A journalistic issue. There have been no contacts about this. All I can say is that Italians are very hospitable. They do everything they can to make their guests feel at ease and I would like to thank them for this”.

so on. Where have we gone wrong? How can women, who have the right to have an abortion, to choose whether or not to get married, to have children with whomever they wish or decide not to, how can they call for a ‘free Palestine’? But are they aware of the role played by women in such a society? Do they know this?

No, clearly they do not. They are unaware because, in order to bring all those protesters together, you need organisers that understand nothing, because those of us who know how things really are do not go to demonstrate and shout nonsense. But unfortunately we have seen this happen all too often. However, I can always find an explanation for all of this. It lies in the way that the left makes use of these forms of ignorance (with the original sense of ‘not knowing’) which are manipulated especially for this vacuum in which the left has been debating for many years. A vacuum which is filled, from time to time, with stupid environmentalism or protests such as these. This is the same left, which, on 27 January, sheds a tear of remembrance for the Holocaust and then – as we have often seen – only loves the Jews when they are dead.

Right: this is a double standard.

There is a lack of consistency here. Jews form part of the history of Europe, they represent its roots: without the Jews, there would be no Europe. And today, we need to defend them because, as you have said, defending them means defending ourselves. What happens to them today will happen to us tomorrow. If there are some people who would be happy with this, I am not one of them. And, above all, as a woman and a citizen, I am ready to do whatever I can to defend my rights, the rights of our girls, our daughters, the right we all have to live in peace and development and not to plunge into the

Middle Ages, just as every country in which Islam has taken power has done. The paradigm is Afghanistan but Iran works just as well.

Absolutely not.

Recent investigations have confirmed the major role that Iran plays in fomenting and supporting terror cells in both the Middle East and in Africa. They even managed to organise an assassination attempt that was passed off as just general crime. Thank God, the Spanish police managed to find the necessary links and the former parliamentarian – one of the founders of *Vox*, Vidal-Quadras¹⁵, was the victim of an assassination attempt which seemed an act of general criminality (in fact, they were common criminals, guilty of various drug-related offences, but organised directly by the Iranian secret services). And this all happened in Spain, a European country. This is a source of concern. As you said right at the start, I am proud to appear on the black list kept by the Iranians and delighted to feature on the white list of democracy.

That much is certain. One final thing: Israel has been fighting bravely in this terrible war. How will it end? I keep hearing the Pope repeating calls for peace and a ceasefire. Do Francesco and the rest of the world see that, if Israel stops, there will be another 7 October in a few years and that this time, instead of 1,200 dead and 200 abducted, there will be at least three times as many?

¹⁵ Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca (1945 -), former Vice President of the European Parliament (1999-2014), formerly President of the People's Party of Catalonia (1991-1996), first President of *Vox*. A close ally of the Iranian exiles, he was hit in the face by a pistol bullet on 9 November 2023 in Madrid. A few days later, the attackers were arrested.

(Sighs.) Had it been Pope Ratzinger, he would not have expressed himself like that. He would have found other words to call for peace. We must never stop striving every day for peace but under one condition: that there are times when peace and the future must be defended through actual self-defence. And this is simply what Israel has done and continues to do and I hope will continue to do until the system perpetuated for years in that region whereby people are destined to become terrorists from birth is eradicated. The first hostage that must be freed is that poor people. This is clear. But freeing the people means eradicating all the terror cells whose ranks, over the years, have been swelled by those interested in creating an explosive mixture ready for use. They had to strike on the eve of the signature of one of the most important agreements within the Abraham Accords, which Israel had patiently constructed in its relations with the rest of the Arab world. They are also Muslims, right? But their Islam holds sway in their own home. Not in anyone else's.

Let us try to wrap things up: you have spent time in Israel and you know the Israeli people. In spite of all of this, how do the Israeli people continue to be ranked among the most satisfied with their quality of life? How can they be happy to live in Israel, despite these serious problems and this terrible war?

You would need to ask them about their incredible spirit which supports them and enables them to put up with such a harsh situation. Moreover, they are used to the role that History has assigned to them and they always play it calmly and with the respect for life and respect for all that they have always been known for. There are some today who claim that

the repression of terrorism is an inhuman act: According to the United Nations, Israel is even guilty of genocide. This shows a total failure to understand the meaning of words. But the deep-rooted crisis in the United Nations has been there for all to see for many years; we had no need to wait until 7 October. Just look at the WHO, look at how China has infiltrated all these international organisations over the years and manipulated them to its interests. Only the Israelis can teach us how to be a guide for ourselves and not throw in the towel, to believe always in life, respect for humanity and for our rights. I have always learned key lessons from the Israelis and I hope I always will – despite the great political contradictions, eh? Because we have seen this: just pay the slightest attention with eyes not blinkered by ideologies that can no longer be supported to see how political debate is thriving in Israel and how the Israeli people themselves are the first to hold their government to account. And this is what democracy means, no? Is there another country where this could happen? No, there isn't! Other countries have only dictatorships – some religious and others not, but only dictatorships. Israel is the only democracy – how can we not give them our support?

Magdi Cristiano Allam

Journalist and writer Magdi Cristiano Allam was born in Egypt in 1952. After getting to know Italian culture through his mother Safeya, he moved to Italy in 1972 where he has always dealt with the Near East and relations between it and the West. He collaborated with *Repubblica* and in 2003 became deputy editor *ad personam* of *Corriere della Sera*, before starting a collaboration with *Liberio Quotidiano* in 2009. Always critical of the Islamic world, on the night of Easter 2008 he was baptised, confirmed and received his First Communion at the hands of Pope Benedict XVI, although criticising the Catholic Church with the start of Francis' pontificate. He has been a member of the European Parliament and has written numerous books appreciated by Italian readers. He has always lived under escort, threatened by the most extreme elements of Italian Islam that sees in him, in his moderation and his denunciations, a real enemy. The feeling of insecurity has increased in recent days, when a Pakistani imam active in Bologna, a certain Zulfiqar Khan, pointed out that Allam's departure from the Muslim religion is apostasy, punishable by death. Magdi then wrote an open letter to Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, asking for his intervention in particular to strengthen his escort. He agreed to speak to me live on the morning of 17 July 2024 during Radio Libertà's Press Review. Of course, as you can imagine, talking about Islam also means talking about Israel and anti-Semitism. From his point of view, Magdi has very clear ideas this time too. Here's what we discussed.

Magdi Cristiano Allam is one of the finest intellectuals in this country and I welcome him with affection and esteem

because yesterday, during the Press Review, I had the opportunity to read to you live the open letter he sent to the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, because—as he says and as *La Verità* published yesterday on page 14— he is targeted by the imam of Bologna and fears for his life. In the meantime, Magdi, thank you for your time, and welcome.

Good morning and thank you to our friends at Radio Libertà.

I'll start with a personal memory: in the spring of 2008, 16 years ago, I was in Rome for my professional exam. and my friend Luigi Accattoli, then Vatican correspondent for *Corriere della Sera*, took me to visit your editorial office in Piazza Venezia. At a certain point we passed an office with armoured doors: 'This is Allam's office, they are setting it up for him because you know the situation is not easy,' he said. It's 16 years later and not only do I see that the situation is still the same, but that things have got even worse: you are accused of apostasy and in Islam, this means death. Or am I talking nonsense?

No, no: that is absolutely correct. Muhammad stated that killing is sanctioned in three cases: adultery, murder, and apostasy. A Muslim who abandons Islam must be killed: unfortunately Islamisation in Italy is growing, and sadly, most Italians are not aware of it.

This is a very serious thing that you are saying, but I notice, Magdi, that since October 7 this pro-Islamic and above all anti-Semitic wave has come out. I'll say one thing: you were baptised as a Roman Catholic Apostolic Christian by Pope Benedict XVI; what has it done to you to hear, this year, more about Ramadan than about Easter?

Well, first of all I want to clarify – with regard to anti-Semitism – that the only unifying factor among Islamists is hatred of Jews, Christians, and especially today, hatred of Israel and the Jewish people. This is not, on the Islamic side, a contingent fact linked to a specific event, but it is the quintessence of Islam: the Koran is the most anti-Jewish text in the world; Muhammad was a slaughterer of Jews, in 627 he personally slit the throats and beheaded the 900 or so Jews of the Banu Kuratza tribe, residents of Mecca. As for the gift of my conversion, I described the Baptism I received from Benedict XVI as the best day of my life. I saw it as a watershed that led me at that moment to choose to engage directly in the struggle so that the ideas I was thinking and writing could be turned into concrete actions. It is a mission to enlighten the minds of Italians, to strengthen spirits and mobilise us against what is a genuine Islamic dictatorship that will threaten and strip away our fundamental rights to dignity, life, and freedom.

Exactly like that nightmare of a novel – which Michel Houellebecq later disavowed – that is *Submission*. Apart from the fact that disowning a novel is a useless gesture: you did write it, it bears your name, why disown it? So it would have been better not to write it.

It is fear.

Exactly. Sorry, but what does Zulfiqar Khan, Pakistani citizen, self-styled Imam of the Islamic Centre in Bologna, want from you? What did you do to him?

We do not know each other and we have never met on any television programme, and that is what is surprising: that is, he went to track down a speech of mine from a week before

– on 30 June in San Miniato in the province of Pisa where I participated in a conference on 7 October in support of Israel – he identified passages from this speech of mine and for two consecutive days he devoted his sermon in the mosque, in front of his followers, to condemning me: as an apostate, a liar and defamer of Islam, and a collaborator with Israel. He does not say so explicitly, but these are all condemnations that envisage the death penalty in Islam; He is a very shrewd character who manages to, how should I put it?, to stir the pot while keeping his involvement hidden, but I feel it is my duty to first inform the Italians of what is happening and also to confront the Minister of the Interior, the high authority in charge of public security, with his responsibility. And I hope for a response, which has not yet been forthcoming.

I'll join you in this request and I believe our listeners will too. But in addition to expressing solidarity with you, I would like to remind our listeners – and indeed you mention this in your letter – that Salman Rushdie wrote this controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*, in 1989, a controversial book in the eyes of the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who issued a fatwa against Rushdie condemning him to death. The fatwa has not been withdrawn – not least because in Islamic law only the authority that issued the fatwa can revoke it, and Khomeini has been dead for 35 years – and this involved Rushdie being stabbed by a fanatic a couple of years ago, a stabbing that cost the writer the loss of an eye. So, Minister Piantedosi: I do not want to talk to the Italian Rushdie; I want to talk to the fine intellectual Magdi Cristiano Allam, not Magdi Cristiano *Rushdie* Allam. We need people who are able to explain why this extremism exists, and

moreover in your letter you refer to self-styled moderate Islam. I imagine you were referring to the UCOII (Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations in Italy), given its proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood, who are not tender-hearted, not like the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and don't help old ladies cross the street. What happened?

First of all, I would like to point out that the death sentence for apostasy is a Muslim's duty, so it does not lapse, and any Muslim is obligated to kill the apostate independently of higher authority. This condemnation is explicitly stated in a hadith, a saying of Muhammad that all Muslims recognise as truthful. The Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an integral part, is outlawed as an organisation, a terrorist movement, in various Islamic countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Hamas is outlawed by much of the international community, except for Islamic countries. However, it should be clarified that the day Israel ends Hamas's rule in Gaza, many Arab countries bordering Israel will rejoice, as Hamas and Islamic terrorism represent a threat primarily to Islamic countries themselves. Egypt's main internal enemy is the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an integral part.

And this should be made clear. Also and especially for those in Italy who ramble on about unity, inclusion and closeness. Also because I would also like to draw your attention to the results of the recent French elections: one piece of data that emerged from these votes is that Melenchon, the radical left, was largely supported by the Islamic minority. And I'll give you a statistic: in 1989, under François Mitterrand, half a million Muslims voted, today that number has risen to three million. Is this all the more reason why we risk seeing similar scenarios in

this country? Could Italy become Islamised like France, which is now on the brink of submission as Houellebecq envisioned?

I also want to recall that the victory in the United Kingdom – apart from the fact that Prime Minister Keir Starmer is an essentially moderate person and has, for family reasons¹⁶, a sympathy for Israel – the Labour Party, on the other hand, is strongly pro-Palestinian and anti-Jewish. The Islamic electorate – even in the UK – voted for the Labour Party: Starmer will, in fact, find his hands tied when he has to take action against Israel. In France and the United Kingdom, we have in fact witnessed the victory of the Islamists: Islam in Europe is progressing firstly because in the face of the demographic collapse of the European peoples, Muslims have a higher birth rate; and secondly because through our naivety – and sometimes through ideological collusion – we have allowed and continue to allow the proliferation of mosques and Koranic schools. In the United Kingdom, there are even Islamic courts that issue rulings on property and family law based on sharia, Islamic law. Lastly, I want to emphasise that Islamisation is proceeding apace because we have now reduced democracy to only the formal aspect of the rite of elections without going to check whether the values underpinning democracy are respected: this allows Islamists to use democracy as a kind of taxi to get to power; and when they get there they replace democracy with sharia, Islamic law, which is completely incompatible with the rule of law.

I would like to point out two things regarding your situation. The first: there is an Imam who is applying Sharia law and

¹⁶ His wife is Jewish.

nobody says anything! This is what is really happening in Italy as you and I speak. The other thing is that this is a Pandora's box that was broken open a few years ago when the UCOOI itself published a fatwa condemning arranged marriages. Now, if this is a secular country in which laws are made by Parliament and not by religious groups, why is it that all this happens here, no one says a word, and when someone points out in this way that things are not going well, they are labelled fascist and racist. Why?

The particularly serious fact – and not all Italians are aware of this – as of now, Islam is not recognised as a religion by the State in Italy, and it is not because it does not comply with Article 8 of the Constitution, which prescribes that non-Catholic religions enjoy equal freedom before the law only if they have entered into an agreement with the State. This is not the case with Islam, and I emphasise this not because the state did not want it, but because Islamists have not agreed on the composition of the delegation to represent them before the state, nor on the policy content to present. The other insurmountable condition is the part of Article 8 of the Constitution whereby the legal system of the religion must not conflict with that of the state. Now, the legal system of Islam is Sharia law, which is totally at odds with the legal system of the Italian Republic: this is why it is truly worrying that despite the fact that Islam is not a religion recognised by the State, Muslims in Italy are granted all the rights and benefits – starting with the building of mosques – as if Islam were a recognised religion. In practice, when it comes to Muslims, Italy as a state – and not just recently, but for decades – behaves as if we were already subject to Islam.

So, does a peaceful, moderate Islam exist in this country, one that has no desire to seize power and, above all, goes to the mosque to pray rather than to listen to sermons against Israel or the West?

We must always distinguish between people and religion. Moderate Muslims do exist, and they are people who prioritise reason and heart over Allah and Muhammad. I have been one for 56 years: but Islam is Islam, because the Koran is unique, and Muhammad is the same. There is no such thing as a moderate Koran and a radical Koran; there is no such thing as a good Muhammad and a violent one; Islam is inherently violent, it is inherently aggressive, confrontational and belligerent; Islam is founded on the assumption that it is the only true religion that must be imposed whatever the cost – by good means or bad – on humanity.

But how then should the Italian state handle relations with Islam? It's not so much about curbing uncontrolled immigration, but the problem lies with those who are already here and were born here, because tomorrow you won't be able to tell them "Go back to your country", since they will reply, "This is my country!" What happens then?

I believe that in a rule of law the only reference is the Constitution. If Islam is not compatible with our Constitution, it goes without saying that it should be outlawed because it is not compatible with our Constitution. Muslims as people, as long as they behave respectfully towards the Constitution, obey our laws, share the founding values of our civilisation, are to all intents and purposes compatible with the Constitution, and the laws and rules upon which our civilisation is based. All those who, on the other hand, contradict the Constitution and the principles upon which

our civilisation is founded, exclude themselves from this rule of law. This is not something subversive: it is something absolutely legal, because either we see the Constitution as the foundation of our peaceful existence, or we condemn ourselves to Islamic dictatorship.

A WhatsApp message has just come in from one of our listeners, Walter: "Hi Antonino and good morning Mr. Allam. In Italy we tolerate intolerant people and this is a very serious mistake. Last week at Berlusconi airport, I reported to the police a person who was completely covered, with only their eyes visible. They looked at me like I was just another nuisance. Walter". Now, Alberto da Pordenone: "Greetings M.C. Allam. A journalist whom I respect and appreciate. I have read four of your books, and I have learnt many things that are not covered in traditional school books. Alberto from PN". There are many things at stake.

Unfortunately, the fear of openly speaking the truth is widespread even within schools. In school textbooks and in universities, reality is often distorted, and this prevents us from being fully ourselves in our own homes. We must always tell the truth: the truth about Islam is that it is not a religion but a system of power; it was born in 622 with its establishment by Muhammad in Medina, where he was because he had been driven out by his fellow citizens of Mecca, from a tribe of which he was both the political and religious leader because he had given himself the rank of messenger of Allah. Islam was born as a reality in which religious and secular power are intrinsically inseparable, and this means that what is a sin for the religion automatically becomes a crime for the state. This is one of the aspects of Islam's incompatibility, but I still emphasise that the Italian state is afraid to confront

Islam, this is the truth: our law enforcement agencies have their hands tied, along with other pressing issues such as demographic decline. Today, the average age of police officers and carabinieri is 50: and a 50-year-old man, often married with children, understandably prioritises protecting his family and stability, and if he is faced with a 20-year-old enemy of the state who aspires to die after killing as many unbelievers as possible... we are in fact losers from the start.

In closing, however, I would like to ask you one thing: what's it like living under escort?

It is a limitation to one's freedom, but it is also a vantage point that allows me to realise how the threat hanging over me actually affects all of us. The limitation of my freedom is an integral part of the limitation of everyone's freedom: I have the ability – because I was a Muslim and I know Islam – to speak the truth, share it, and affirm reality. Unfortunately, I see that most Italians are afraid to face reality, afraid to be fully themselves in our home, I stress our home: Italy is our home, not a land belonging to everyone and no one, and it must not become an Islamic territory.

Some of our listeners are now writing asking what taqiya is...

It is concealment and is one of the precepts of Islam practised by Muhammad in 628 when he was unable to defeat his enemies in Mecca. He stipulated a truce agreement that he was to keep for 10 years but, a little over a year later, he returned with military force to Mecca and occupied it. For Muslims – this is the message – one cannot make peace with the enemy but deceive him through a truce and exploit the first opportunity for betrayal.

Our voice rises together with that of Magdi Cristiano Allam towards the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Piantedosi: Minister, please take care of Magdi Cristiano Allam's safety because we do not want taqiya, submission, but need someone who will continue to hold high the torch of rights, of secularism – the real one – and of freedom under the rule of law. Thank you for your time and for joining us today.

Thank you, Radio Liberty.

Fiammetta Martegani

The truth, Aldo Moro used to say, is always enlightening and one should not regret speaking it: it fosters courage. I believe he was right, just as I believe that my guest, almost at the conclusion of this book and almost like the final scene of a detective story in which the murderer is finally revealed, has truly tried to pinpoint the point, the malign and evil essence of October 7: and I am not surprised that it is a woman, a colleague who is also an anthropologist and an art expert like Fiammetta Martegani, who says so. Because it takes the delicacy and sharp awareness of someone who can catch the messages in signs (and works of art are signs of human intelligence), someone who knows how to distinguish between Beauty and Horror to bring us to the deepest level of our entire journey. Fiammetta has personally experienced the meaning of October 7: how a minority can be annihilated without the world lifting a finger, and how the phenomenon of antisemitism is not practiced only against Jews but can be directed against any minority targeted for annihilation, carried out with displays of violence. Violence that is flaunted, deliberate, and exhibited for all to see—and for all to remain silent. So that the limit may be crossed and erased: today, the South of Israel, the Nova festival, the kibbutz of Be’eri with its load of horror and death; tomorrow, the world. It is a fire that has been set, and the West seems indifferent, intent on following and certifying, from chant to chant, from boycott to boycott, Hamas’s media victory over Israel. *Mala tempora currunt (bad times ahead)* This is not a Quentin Tarantino film, but a nightmare from which Israel cannot currently wake up. And what about us, comfortably sunbathing on a

beach holiday? We have debates at the beach, in a laid-back seaside style, as Giuni Russo would have sung.

This interview was conducted on 21 August 2024.

I have the pleasure of speaking with Fiammetta Martegani, a colleague who writes for Avvenire. An anthropologist, she has lived in Israel for years where she is a Curator at the Eretz Israel Museum. She is also a writer, having published a novel titled *Life on Mars*, as well as *Tel Aviv – Il mondo in tasca*, and – as a lover of Venice, her soul’s place – wrote a guide to the city according to the five senses. I would like to ask you, Fiammetta, since you have lived in Israel for professional and personal reasons for 15 years: how does one transition from a country that has lived in peace for 80 years to one where it is mandatory to have a security room to lock oneself in when there’s an attack with missiles from Hezbollah or Hamas?

I believe that – to answer your question about how one gets used to it – one of the greatest challenges of living in Israel is precisely learning to get used to it. To everything. You get used to living with a *mamad* (secure room) in your house, if you’re lucky enough to have one: because not all Israelis have a security room at home. I am one of the lucky ones who has one, but there are people who have 90 seconds to cross the street and run to a shelter outside their building. This is just one of many examples of how you get used to everything, living in Israel. I could go on indefinitely, even from the most trivial things: my appointment with my gynaecologist, scheduled for mid-October, was postponed by six months because he had been in Gaza for six months, as had thousands of doctors like him.

The list is endless: I consider myself lucky because my son

is 8 years old, but I have friends whose children, over 18, are in Gaza or at the border with Lebanon. But even in this situation, you get used to everything.

I think, however, that what is hardest to understand for those accustomed to a Western lifestyle is understanding that Israel is the only country in the world, despite having a Western lifestyle – where our peers love eating sushi, watching *Sex and the City*, and using Tinder – but in fact, they live in the Middle East and are forced to coexist with Middle Eastern dynamics where, unfortunately, the concept of life and death is constantly questioned in daily life. I believe the hardest thing for a Westerner to understand is this strange combination that exists only in Israel in the world.

I’ve provided this context because I’ve followed your posts on Facebook, your articles for Avvenire, your interventions with us on Radio Libertà, with Giulio Cainarca, and on numerous TV programmes. I remember one of your first interviews on La7, where you pointed out to the host and the other guests in the studio: “Excuse me, I’m here risking my life under missiles, it would be polite to let me speak first.” Since then, little has changed. Since October 7 – but it’s always October for you, and I see on Facebook that you keep track of the days since that date. How has this tragedy fallen on Israel, a country that has been at war for 76 years with those who want to annihilate it?

Actually, you’ve asked two questions in one: on one hand, how has life been in Israel since October 7, and on the other, I would say, how has life been in Israel since 14 May 1948, the date when the independence of the State of Israel was declared under UN Resolution 187 (28 November 1947) that divided the then British Mandate Palestine into two: Israel and the state that

was supposed to become that of the Palestinians. However, less than 24 hours after the declaration of independence, Israel was attacked by seven neighbouring countries. And it's since then that this long war – with a series of ceasefires – has never really ended. October 7 is only the epilogue of these 76 years of conflict, during which most neighbouring countries – except, today, Egypt and Jordan – still do not recognise the State of Israel. So we should start from 14 May 1948, to arrive at 7 October 2023: what happened that day, in its tragedy, is nothing more than the confirmation of these 76 years of denial of the existence of the State of Israel. In fact, Hamas, among the various entities that deny Israel's existence, is one of the most consistent, because in its 1988 manifesto, in which the party's values and intentions were declared, it was clearly written that one of the goals of this entity was the destruction of the State of Israel. What happened on 7 October, 2023, was one of the declared goals of Hamas, even then. On the other hand, if – absurdly – Hamas had wanted to obtain a Palestinian state in exchange for the hostages it kidnapped, this request could have been made on 8 October or (and this the media never talks about) in the 10 months following. But this request was never made. Suppose that on 8 October, Hamas had declared, “We did what we did, killed 1,200 civilians, and kidnapped 250 Israelis in exchange for a Palestinian state,” whether right or wrong, this would have been a request that could have been evaluated. But since then, over 10 months have passed, and in fact, no request has ever been made because Hamas's goal – neither on October 7 nor in its 1988 manifesto – was never to establish its own state, but only to eliminate the State of Israel, which, according to their logic, should be part of the great Palestinian state “from the river to the sea,” as proclaimed by pro-Palestinian voices around the world.

From the river to the sea is a slogan I associate with Sieg Heil, from the time of Adolf Hitler.

These are cries from people, I think, who have studied neither history nor geography. A while ago, there was an article by Daniela Santus, a professor of Cultural Geography and Mediterranean countries at the University of Turin¹⁷, who explained how she circulated an anonymous questionnaire among her students and also among students from other faculties who frequented the same university library. The most interesting thing wasn't that these students didn't know which river or sea from the river to the sea referred to, but that when asked, “What is the capital of Israel?” answers like “Cairo” came up. Similarly, when asked, “What is the most practiced religion in Israel by percentage?” many answered, “Islam.” It would almost be laughable if it weren't so tragic, because we're talking about people who are either graduated or on their way to graduation at a prestigious university like the University of Turin.

On the other hand, Italy is not an exception and only confirms the rule. Israeli-American journalist Noa Tishby went to the Sundance Festival – one of the most prestigious film festivals in the United States¹⁸ – and interviewed students and pro-Palestinian activists of various ages who were protesting outside the festival. When asked, “Why are you here? What rights are you defending?” at one point, an older woman

¹⁷ The absurd case of Professor Santus, i.e., the discovery of misstatements and ignorance about Israel and Palestine, was recounted in *Pagine Ebraiche* in 2009. Find it here: <https://moked.it/blog/2009/02/16/quando-la-mecca-e-a-gerusalemme-intervista-a-daniela-santus/>

¹⁸ The Times of Israel reported on 23 January 2024 https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/hamas-isnt-even-in-gaza-noa-tishby-interviews-anti-israel-protesters/

replied, “Not for Hamas.” And when the journalist pressed, “Then for whom?” the woman replied, “Hamas doesn’t even live in Gaza.” It’s clear, then, that most of these supposed pro-Palestinians, no matter what country they come from, have no idea about the history or geography of the 20th century. Because let’s not forget that what happened after October 7 is just the tip of the iceberg: the result of the total lack of knowledge of the historical facts of the 20th century that led to the legitimisation of the ongoing conflict. A conflict, from my point of view, not only between Israelis and Hamas. I’m convinced that one day our children, in school books, when studying World War III – just as we learned from historiography that World War I began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo – will learn that the Third World War began with the invasion of Ukraine by the Red Army and that the Israel-Hamas clash is just an episode within what is, in fact, the continuation of the Cold War. If you look at the allies on both sides, nothing has really changed: we are facing the same setup as the Cold War with one true and immense change. That is, within the Allies’ axis, some voices that were once outliers have now become the majority, supporting a cause – whether right or wrong – without any knowledge of the history (and geography) of that cause. Because if they were true supporters of the Palestinian cause, they should also know how many Palestinians have been killed by Hamas itself. For example, it surprises me when members of the LGBTQ+ community side with Hamas, while any Palestinian homosexual is literally thrown out of a window – literally thrown out of a window – by Hamas, not to mention the feminists who haven’t sided with Israeli women who have been killed, kidnapped, raped, and who are still suffering, over 10 months later. Let’s not forget that

there are still over a hundred hostages in Gaza, of whom, unfortunately, we don’t know who is still alive. But many of these are women who, as we know from the hostages who returned to Israel, are regularly raped by Hamas and by the civilians who guard them on behalf of the terrorists. The majority of supposed feminists around the world have their mouths shut – I don’t want to just talk about Italian feminists – the women of the UN who took 57 days (from October 7) to declare solidarity with Israeli women. What we are witnessing today is a total disconnect from reality. The other day – when you were interviewing me, I was in Venice – I went to the Lido to visit my mother and her friends, where there were all these women in bikinis discussing the Israel-Hamas conflict, together with their satisfied husbands. The first thing I pointed out to them was: “It’s very interesting that you can discuss this in bikinis on the beach, because in Gaza, this would never be possible, and you would probably have been killed a long time ago.” Discussing the Israel-Hamas conflict is more than legitimate, but doing it from the beach, or from the comfortable lounges of Milan, London, or New York, completely loses its meaning when you completely forget the context of the ongoing conflict, that is, a geographical region where women, according to the precepts of radical Islam, have no value, they are a mere exchange object, so much so that in Islam, men have the right to have four wives at the same time. Long before October 7, many so-called feminists forgot about their Muslim sisters and how their rights have been systematically crushed for centuries. Today, we are witnessing all these paradoxes and contradictions where, on one hand, people defend this supposed Palestinian cause, which in reality has been exploited by extremist factions – and not only by Hamas – long before October 7; on the other

hand, they forget how, as written in Hamas's manifesto, it calls for the Islamisation not only of Israel and the Middle East but also of the West, because the ultimate goal of radical Islam is conversion, for all. This is another element that many Westerners forget because most of them have never read the Koran: a text that should absolutely be read before one can coherently analyse the Arab-Israeli conflict.

All the more reason to ask: what does the West not understand about Israel? The leitmotif of this text is basically based on two questions: first, is it dangerous to be Jewish or pro-Israel in the world today? And if so, why? We have seen Italian universities protesting by demanding that our universities cancel their agreements with Israeli universities because they 'produce military technology'. For that matter, razor blades are also a military technology from the First World War, invented because soldiers had to shave every day to make their gas masks stick in case of mustard gas attacks: but the fact that I use the same razor today does not make me a murderer. We often talk about dual-use technology, but the fact remains that on the one hand there is a country that is the only democracy in the Middle East, a bulwark of the West; on the other hand there is a terrorist group that kills in the name of its own vision of God. Where has something been lost in translation, and what has been lost?

Let's start with your first question, the boycott of several universities around the world against Israeli universities, professors, and students. This is a classic example of hypocrisy since, as we know, Israeli universities are part of the world's high-tech excellence. You mention the razor blade, but there is not a mobile phone in the world, for example, that does

not have technology or applications inside it that were not invented by Israelis. Theoretically every pro-Palestinian in the world should therefore decide, from now on, to go without a mobile phone. Not to mention scientific or medical research, if you think, quite simply, not only at the academic level but also in civil society, how Israel, as the first country in the world, accepted the risk of testing the COVID vaccine firsthand, saving the lives of billions of people and taking on a risk that certainly wasn't guaranteed. But this is part of what we were saying at the beginning: Israelis are used to everything, even risking their own lives for the common good, so for an Israeli, the risks of the vaccine compared to the everyday risks of dying from an enemy living just a few kilometres away, was not experienced with the same intensity as in other Western countries. Nevertheless, the West has completely forgotten that the danger of death from the Covid today has also disappeared thanks to the vaccine, and that it was the Israeli people who were the guinea pigs of all mankind.

Another thing I like to mention when I say 'Israeli people' is that often, out of ignorance, we always associate Israel with Jewish identity. Let us not forget that Jews are indeed the majority in Israel, but 20 per cent of the Israeli population is made up of Arabs, Christians, Muslims, Circassians, Druze: many of whom are proudly part of the Israeli army because they feel an integral part of the country. So when you boycott an Israeli university, you are not only boycotting Jews, but also Muslims, Christians, Druze, Circassians. And I would like to emphasise, since you remember that in addition to being a journalist, I am also a curator, how the boycott of Israeli art in the last 10 months has destroyed the careers of artists who, by definition – all over the world, as in Israel –

are the most critical part of all societies, and in the case of Israeli society even more so. In fact, boycotting professors and artists means boycotting the most enlightened part of Israeli society within which, again, we have Jewish professors and artists, Muslims, Druze and so on. So it is a boycott that is completely useless and, indeed, harms those very voices that are crucial to safeguarding the country's democracy.

In these days when I am in Venice, as curator, I took the opportunity to visit the Biennale where, as always, I was struck by a series of paradoxes, some of which I will mention just to give you an idea. Let's start with the Israeli Pavilion, which was set up but closed, from the day the Biennale opened, at the behest of the artist and the curators, until the day the hostages were freed and a cease-fire was achieved. Apart from the strong political message, one of the reasons why Ruth Patir, Mira Lapidot and Tamar Margalit – i.e. the artist and the curators – had decided not to open was also because they rightly feared the repercussions from potential boycotters who, even violently, could have destroyed the pavilion and the artworks. Yet, because as we said before, most people have no idea about history, geography, let alone the history of art, 100 metres from the Israeli Pavilion is the German Pavilion where the two artists taking part this year are a German and an Israeli, namely Yael Bartana¹⁹ who has lived in Berlin for years and had been invited to participate

¹⁹ Yael Bartana (1970-). Born in Kfar Yehezkel, a moshav (settlement) in northern Israel. A versatile artist, she is also a filmmaker and photographer and enjoys blending all the mediums she works with. Many of her works deal with political or feminist themes: she has exhibited at the MoMA in New York, the Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. She was a guest artist at the Biennale back in 2011 with the film trilogy *And Europe Will Be Stunned* screened at the Polish Pavilion and dealing with the relationship between Judaism and Polish identity.

in the pavilion's design long before October 7. Fortunately, because people are ignorant, no one bothered to check who the artist was who was presenting at the German pavilion, and that is why the pavilion is open, it has not been damaged by any pro-Palestinian flags or slogans. However, and this struck me very much, among the Biennale's **outdoor pavilions there is a very interesting pavilion, hosted by the Academy of Fine Arts, where a Palestinian flag was prominently displayed above the artwork of Josèfa Ntjam²⁰**, which was so striking that I thought it was the artist's own idea. When I later checked, I discovered that the artist was completely unaware of it because the Biennial opened in April, while the students of the Academy of Fine Arts hoisted this flag in May and it has never been taken down since. The academic authorities have seen fit to leave it there, regardless of the ideology behind it, and despite the fact that it affects the work of art, legitimising an incursion of politics into the world of art, not respecting the vision of the artist nor of those who go to the Biennale to have an aesthetic and non-political experience. It does not matter whether the flag is Palestinian, Israeli or Australian Aboriginal: any flag displayed is, in fact, an incursion into the artist's aesthetic vision.

I went into this analysis on the political appropriation of the Biennale because in my opinion it is a good example to show the cultural short-circuit that is not so much dictated by the choice of appropriating – even from a cultural point of view – the Palestinian flag, but in the appropriation and instrumentalisation of any kind of flag. It is frightening if one thinks of the recent student movements in American

²⁰ Born in 1992, Born in 1992, Josèfa Ntjam is an artist, performer, and poet who works with sculpture, photomontage, video, and sound. She has exhibited in Tokyo, Paris, Brussels and Lyon.

universities where, following the pro-Palestine wave, one witnessed the burning not only of the Israeli flag, but even of the American flag, as a country representing the values of the West. It doesn't matter whether it's the United States, Australia or Zimbabwe (I deliberately mentioned two states that represent the first and last letters of the alphabet) – but if one's own country's flag is burned, then it means that we have crossed a line from which it will be difficult to return. And, in my opinion, the most serious thing about what happened on October 7 was precisely this: what Hamas did to the Israeli population did not only affect Jews, but also Muslims, Christians, and Thais (who worked in the kibbutz camps) who on October 7 were (all, without distinction) kidnapped, killed, and raped: not only females, but also males, children, and corpses (Hamas was accused by the Hague Tribunal not only of rape, but also of paedophilia and necrophilia).

Therefore, what happened on October 7 is not only the massacre itself, but the first case in human history in which a crime like this was broadcast online, because – if we want to make a comparison with other genocides, from the Shoah to Rwanda – never would the perpetrators have thought of broadcasting their crime online. On the contrary, they guarded themselves against this, because, in order to perpetrate their crime, it was essential that it not be known about.

What happened on October 7, however, is that Hamas did what it did with the specific desire for the whole world to know, and by demonstrating that, in fact, this crime could be committed without any hindrance and without any hesitation not only against Jews, but also against Muslims, Christians, Thais, and many other nationalities who were in Israel for work and who were killed, kidnapped, raped. One can hardly imagine Hamas confusing a Thai with an Israeli,

any more than they could confuse them with Arabs who, in Arabic, quoting the Koran, pleaded with their Muslim brothers not to be killed, kidnapped, raped. But Hamas didn't bat an eyelash, just like the rest of the world.

Let us not forget that among the 250 of those kidnapped, over half were citizens with a second nationality. Apart from numerous Asian workers from Thailand, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, among the hostages were numerous Israeli citizens with dual passports: American, British, French, Canadian, and other western countries. None of these countries, except the Netherlands and Argentina, made any effort to release a citizen with a double passport: none of the other countries did anything for their citizens to be released by Hamas.

So, after October 7, every boundary was crossed: because those who were killed on October 7, unfortunately, will never return home, but ten months later, there are still hostages with double passports who have been abandoned by their country and by the UN: the UN that should safeguard the rights of citizens all over the world.

What about the UN as UNWRA, the agency for Palestinian refugees in Gaza that has the electricity meter connected to the Hamas tunnels and many of whose employees were directly involved in the October 7 massacre?

Unfortunately, today's UN is not the one that declared the partition of mandated Palestine into two states in 1947. Among other things, another of the phenomena that leaves me increasingly perplexed by these pro-Palestinians is that, on the one hand, they refer to UN resolutions to support Palestinian rights while, on the other hand, they always forget that it was the UN itself, in 1947, that declared the independence of the State of Israel, which today, after 76

years, is not only not recognised by Hamas but, in fact, also by those in the West who are still discussing Israel's right to exist. This is because if Israel's right to exist were undisputed, we would not still be discussing whether or not Iran has the right to attack Israel, because if such a conversation instead of Iran and Israel involved, for example, Spain and France, it would simply make no sense, it would not exist. No one would ever argue about France's right to launch 350 ballistic missiles against Spain, or vice versa. Thus, the absurdity of this war is not only in what is happening today, but in the historical premises that, for 76 years, legitimised a discourse that allowed us to arrive at October 7 and, on the part of the world, to pretend that nothing had happened.

These days the race for the White House is unfolding: what will happen if Donald Trump wins or if Kamala Harris wins? Above all, what will become of Benjamin Netanyahu? It is often said that Israel cannot end the war otherwise Netanyahu would end up on trial, but he – politically speaking – now looks like a zombie.

Let me make a crucial premise for me: I am an expert on the Middle East and not on the United States; therefore, I am not in a position to predict what will happen, but as an expert in US-Israeli relations, I am convinced that the close diplomatic relations between these two countries will not change, regardless of who wins the elections.

As for Netanyahu, unfortunately he is by no means a political corpse. The fact is that he is still in office and that if the government does not collapse, elections in Israel will only be held in 2026. This does not rule out Netanyahu continuing his career (it also depends heavily on when and how this conflict concludes).

However, it is important to reiterate that due to the complex Israeli electoral system – like the American one – the incumbent premier by no means represents an absolute majority in the country.

Also, I would like to say is that – although the fact that I am not a Netanyahu fan is common knowledge – that any person who had been in Netanyahu's place at this historic moment would have found himself in a stalemate in reaching an agreement with Hamas, because this party does not want to sign any agreement at all, otherwise on October 7 he would not have done what he did.

And, I keep repeating, no such offer has been made since October 7: 'We will give you all the hostages back in exchange for a state'. The only purpose of Hamas – apart from trying to make victims, kidnap hostages, rape as many Israeli citizens as possible – has been to create a consensus on the part of the Western world, which has lined up, if only on a media level, in the pro-Hamas wave. Hamas, therefore, did not win politically, because the West is still siding with Israel, but from the media point of view it won Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, all the social platforms that, in the long run, could have a huge political impact. This is the real victory of Hamas and there is no shadow of a doubt about this: on October 7, they won, because they broadcast the massacre online and, in fact, this massacre was not prevented but, on the contrary, applauded. This was Hamas's greatest victory, so that even if a cease-fire were to be signed tomorrow morning, Hamas would still have won from the media point of view. This was Sinwar's real, brilliant strategy²¹, apart from kidnapping hostages. I challenge

²¹ Yahyah Sinwar (Khan Younis, 1962), head of Hamas in Gaza and since 6 August 2024 also political head of the terrorist movement.

any other prime minister to come to an agreement with an entity like Hamas and with the conditions they offered. I say this not at all to defend Netanyahu, but because the world has forgotten not only what Hamas did on October 7, but more importantly, what their goal is. Namely, not to have a state, but to destroy Israel and gain as much consensus as possible not only in the Middle East but also in the West, legitimising hatred and crimes that once would never have been accepted, including that according to which it is legitimate to kidnap and rape civilians. So if one day, absurdly, a crazed Australian decided to kidnap and rape all the Aborigines and do it online, he could do it now because, after October 7, anyone has assumed the right to do whatever he wants.

This was, in my opinion, one of the most dangerous cultural operations carried out on October 7, because, in fact, a boundary was crossed such that, from now on, whichever minority or majority decides to take advantage of the other in whatever way – kidnapping, raping, slashing throats or burning entire families, it happened on October 7 – can now be done because we had a precedent, so that tomorrow the French Swiss could do it against the German Swiss, or vice versa. Basically, we witnessed the end of a taboo. This was, in my opinion, the greatest disgrace of October 7, which the West is still struggling to admit.

Let us come to the last question: is it dangerous today to be Jewish or pro-Israeli? Nowadays it is enough to say: 'I am with Israel' to be labelled as 'Genocidal' or 'Nazi'.

Look, I struggle to give you an answer because I, while here in Italy on holiday, am still perceived as 'Italian', and not as 'Israeli'. This is because it is easier to think in terms of rigid categories and tear complexity to shreds.

First of all, I feel like a citizen of the world and, for this very reason, what worries me most now is that when you allow a minority to be crushed, it doesn't matter if that minority is the Jews, because tomorrow morning it could be, for example, Australian Aborigines.

I think the great virus of anti-Semitism is a millennia-old disease, which carries with it the ideology of 'if we are a majority it is legitimate to destroy a minority'. And this, I believe, is the real danger of anti-Semitism, today as it was then.

That is why, when I hear certain shallow conversations, I ask myself: 'But what if you were the minority in question tomorrow?' It is very difficult to put oneself in other people's shoes and it is instead very easy to follow the populist wave: now the media wave is pro-Palestinian, because the so-called Global Intifada has become fashionable. But the fact that the Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts of the University of Venice has not removed the flag from the university courtyard is serious, not because it is the Palestinian flag, but because tomorrow it could be another flag. So, the moment you legitimise the destruction of a minority – no matter what it is – you are in fact destroying a slice of the world.

And this is the point: how was it possible to have legitimised the destruction of a minority. Pier Paolo Pasolini said: 'They have their violence, I have my culture'. So now I turn to you as curator: can there be a cultural response to all this? I remember Gesualdo Bufalino saying in the early 1980s, during the mafia wars in Sicily, 'It will take generations of Sicilians raised on books and Mozart': will it take generations of Gazans raised on books and Mozart? Certainly, but the problem does not concern the Gazans, it concerns all of us, from Milan to New York, including PhD

students at Columbia University. Because culture is not just the school curriculum syllabus: it is, as Bufalino said, above all, Mozart. And, unfortunately, the contemporary society we live in, increasingly dependent on the world of social media, ensures that 15-year-olds are busy posting a new story with a new dance and new sunglasses, while at 15, I was reading Cesare Pavese, and a 15-year-old American was reading John Steinbeck.

Now, busy as they are with Tiktok, they think it is fashionable to sing from the river to the sea, without knowing where the river is, let alone the sea in question.

When there is a lack of culture, the effects are catastrophic across the board, right down to politics, and the parliamentarians who represent us: in Italy, in Europe or on the UN benches. Unfortunately, the Gazans have never had this kind of culture, but they are not the only ones: by now, even in the West, the concept of culture is becoming an option that is often mocked. If the director of a department such as that of Fine Arts in Venice appropriates a work of art that is not even his, it means that by now the concept of 'culture' has been skipped.

To conclude: Fiammetta, I am not asking you to make predictions because you do not possess a glass ball, but I am asking you a personal question. There is a moment, those five minutes before going to sleep at night, when everyone makes a kind of summary. What do your summaries, from Tel Aviv, look like these days?

Rather than before I go to sleep, since you have been sleeping poorly since October 7, I share with you my first thought in the morning, as soon as I wake up, often with a start, as indeed all Israelis have, since that Black Saturday. This sort of

automatic wake-up call has developed in the minds of Israelis, before 6.30am, which is the time when Hamas started firing rockets towards the south of the country, before breaking into the kibbutzim and doing what it did. That's why it's been 10 months since a whole country has slept: my son, who was used to sleeping alone since he was 3 months old, and now he's 8 years old, almost always wakes up in the middle of the night and wants to come and sleep in the big bed. Even in Venice, not only in Tel Aviv, because he is not only afraid of rockets, which of course don't come to Venice, but because he is afraid of his own survival.

So, to answer your question, every morning, when I wake up out of the blue more or less around 5:30 a.m. my first thought, for a split second, is, "It was just a nightmare, it didn't really happen: now I wake up and everything will be back to normal."

And, instead, it only takes a split second to remember that it was not a nightmare, and that nothing normal is left now.

Thank you. *Am Israel Chai*.

Let's hope. Not only *Am Israel Chai*, my wish is that the whole world remains *Chai*, because culture is everyone's and the world is one, for everyone.

And it could not be better said.

Ghila Piattelli

Ghila Piattelli, a Roman writer, has lived in Israel for more than 30 years. With a degree in Philosophy from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a postgraduate degree in Communication Sciences from Bar Ilan University, she returned to Italy in 2001 working with the Centro di cultura ebraica di Roma (Centre for Jewish Culture in Rome) and worked at the Israeli Embassy. Since 2009 she has been living in Israel again and working as a translator and teacher of Italian. She published, with Giuntina, *Resta ancora un po'* ('Stay a little longer'), released in 2020. A passionate and lucid writer, she takes us deep into the pain of an entire country. This interview was collected in early September 2024.

How did October 7 fall on the lives of Israelis and yours in particular?

6:29 a.m. on 7 October 2023 is the watershed between a before and an after in the lives of all Israelis, including me. Nothing will be like before, our lives are now marked by the massacre and the war that followed. We have been living in a constant state of emergency for almost a year now, with thoughts of our captive hostages in Gaza and concern for the soldiers at the front. One lives with bated breath, trying to construct a kind of normality that is, however, in fact fictitious, because there is nothing normal about the situation we are experiencing. On the contrary, it is precisely normalisation that is the greatest danger: one is forbidden from getting used to the idea that 101 Israelis are prisoners in the tunnels in Gaza, that terrorist attacks are now perpetrated almost daily against Israeli civilians, and that the cities on the border with Lebanon are constantly the target of Hezbollah missiles.

What is life like in Israel today?

Imagine a person who wakes up in the morning and gets ready to go to work; then he takes his children to school, goes to the office, then to the supermarket, to run or to Pilates class, comes home has dinner with his family, takes the dog out, reads a book or sees a movie, and then goes to sleep. Imagine this person performing all these actions with a burden of dozens of kilograms on his or her shoulders. With this weight on him, everything is more difficult. For almost a year now, Israelis have been carrying the grief for the fallen, the concern for the hostages and the boys at the front along with that for a future that seems increasingly uncertain. Israel is fighting a war of survival on several fronts, including internally. The divisions that mark Israeli society are its Achilles heel, and at this tragic time, everything should be done to remain united. But in the same breath, it must be said that Israel is a country that, yes, has been hit hard, but has quickly gotten back on its feet. Israelis are a resilient people who know how to come out of moments of crisis, and they are doing so this time as well. There is a word in Hebrew that is untranslatable into Italian with only one word: *tushià*. Tushià means resourcefulness, ingenuity, know-how. It is practical wisdom as the Greeks understood it, and it is tushià that has enabled Israelis to rise up in the aftermath of the greatest tragedy Israel has faced in its seventy-six years of independence.

Some say Israel is deeply torn by this affair. Netanyahu's fault or whose?

The October 7 pogrom turned the most terrible nightmares of Israeli society into reality. No one imagined before that a massacre of this magnitude could be carried out nor that Israeli civilians could be taken from their homes and dragged

into Gaza, wounded, maimed, on motorcycles and Pick up trucks. This shook the foundations of all the certainties of Israelis from 1948 to the present and further divided Israeli society. These ideological splits are not a minor consequence of the war, a purely accidental occurrence, but part of Hamas' design to undermine the foundations on which the State of Israel rests. One should not be confused: the only culprit in the situation in which Israel finds itself at the moment is Hamas along with what is called the axis of evil led by Iran, which aims at the destruction of the State of Israel. That of internal divisions is one more war front, which is why Israeli society at this time has a moral obligation to remain united, because it has learned on its own skin what the price of divisions and lacerations has been.

How are relations with the Arab population in Israel?

The Israeli population consists of Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, Bedouins and other small minorities. All enjoy civil rights, including the right to vote, can practice their religion freely, are represented in parliament, and have access to all public services. In fact, there are some inequalities and discrimination, and not all Arab Israeli citizens enjoy the rights they would be entitled to by law, especially in the labour market. The fact that some Israeli Arabs have committed terrorist acts against the Jewish population or given support to Palestinian terrorists generates distrust. There are, however, happy islands, happy in a manner of speaking, such as hospitals, where Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs, work elbow to elbow as doctors and paramedical staff. But there is no doubt that inclusion is one of the challenges Israel faces, and if it were not in a constant state of emergency, perhaps everything would be easier.

Why do you think the West fails to understand the meaning of Israel's struggle against Hamas?

Israel has always failed to explain its reasons to the world, for many reasons. One of them is that it is very easy to fall into the trap of associating the crimes committed by Hamas with the Palestinian cause, thus making the violence committed by the terrorists understandable and partly justifiable if placed in the context in which they constitute the only tool available to the oppressed against the oppressor. The attack Hamas launched on October 7 had nothing to do with the Palestinian cause. Hamas's ideological motive is in the tradition of eliminationist anti-Semitism, and Hamas's charter rejecting 'any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea' incites the destruction of Israel. Many in the West are victims of this misunderstanding. Those who truly care about the Palestinian cause must understand that Palestinian civilians must be liberated from Hamas.

20-year-old boys in Israel are put on a 70-ton Merkava tank and sent to the front. They go there and, if necessary, die. In Italy, their peers, on the other hand, cry genocide and call for cutting agreements with Israeli universities. Yet both are Westerners, and until October 7, the children in Israel lived without a care in the world. Where is the incommunicability between these two parts of the West?

Unfortunately, from 1948 to the present, Israeli youth have never lived without thoughts. Everyone has fought his war, as a conscript or as a reservist. There is no difference between Generation Z and Generation '48, between our children and our grandparents. By different means they are forced to fight the same war of survival, both aware of the price the Jewish

people paid eighty years ago, when the State of Israel did not exist, and when the State was unable to give a timely and effective response on October 7. When one's existence is in danger, one does the impossible. This is why young men in their twenties, as well as reservists in their forties who leave their wives and children at home, get on a tank; do they have any other choice? The young Italians who recite the famous slogan *from the river to the sea*, are instead victims of the misunderstanding that sees Hamas as a champion of the Palestinian cause and Israel as a colonialist and aggressor state that massacres tens of thousands of defenceless civilians. These young people, who are screaming genocide and calling for the agreements with Israeli universities to be cut, are also unwittingly part of the Iranian design, which aims at the destruction of Israel even in the face of international public opinion.

How will this war end, if it ends?

The outcome of this war is uncertain, there are many factors that will determine how it will end, first and foremost the release of the hostages. It is difficult to move forward with this complete lack of perspective. But pessimism is a luxury that Israel has never been able to afford, least of all at this time. One has to believe that eventually Hamas will be disarmed, that the displaced will return to their homes, and that the hostages will be freed. Every now and then, I find myself imagining the moment when my fellow citizen Naama Levi, a 19-year-old girl kidnapped on October 7, will return home. I see the minivan carrying Naama through the streets of my city, and I imagine her mother, Dr. Ayelet Levi Shachar smiling again. I know it will happen, I have to believe it, otherwise I am out of breath.

What could happen if Trump wins, and what if Harris wins?

Whoever wins the US presidential election will have a moral obligation to defend and support Israel, the outpost of the West in the Middle East, which embodies all the democratic values for which the West has fought. The October 7 attack was an attack on the Western world and not just Israel, just like 9/11.

The Nuovo PCI (New Italian Communist Party) has made a proscription list against 'Zionist agents'. How is it viewed in Israel?

Little has been said about it, personally I learned about it from the Italian media. It is an act of anti-Semitism, and it is clear to everyone in Israel that anti-Semitism is an endemic disease, and as such it changes guise by adapting to historical conditions and circumstances, but it is never eradicated.

Riccardo Pacifici

Almost 365 days have passed since war broke out in the Middle East. This final interview ideally concludes the book: it was granted to me by a courageous and respectable man who speaks candidly. He is Riccardo Pacifici, former president of the Jewish Community of Rome and today vice-president of the European Jewish Association: he has an open mind and makes no concessions to anyone as he speaks. Pacifici is clear: Israel will survive this time too, having survived a drama like the Shoah. It is not a perfect country, but it does not need lessons on democracy or human rights from anyone: and, above all, thanks to the Abrahamic Accords brokered by Donald Trump during his presidency, it will finally be able to coexist in peace with the Arab states. One basic problem remains: what about after Gaza? It must start again with the children, and on this Pacifici has a sensible and peaceful proposal: it is time to raise these little ones in love and not in the fanatical and indoctrinating hatred of Hamas. The hope is that Israel will be able, after winning the war, to win the peace. This interview was recorded on 15 September 2024.

Riccardo Pacifici, former president of the Jewish Community of Rome and today vice-president of the European Jewish Association: in the West there is a hatred against Jews and against pro-Israelis that can be cut with a knife. Why has it come to this?

I was struck when he said: "A hatred so thick you could cut it with a knife." Perhaps that is the one that emerges and is the loudest; however, there are much finer blades that, instead, bear witness to great affection, immense solidarity, and – I must say – profound understanding. What do I mean? I

do not want to refer to what is happening in Italy: I want to refer to the fact that in relationships between people – as often happens in human and social relationships – there are times when each of us understand who our real friends are and who those are who may have been able to lie for so many years, even those one has had lunch or dinner with. It is said that friendships can be cemented through the consumption of salt, that after a kilo of salt consumed together (according to the old traditions) one can speak of a friendship; there have certainly been disappointments of people who, in all likelihood, were already harbouring feelings and had occasion to manifest them in the most vicious and – at times – even mean-spirited way. There are those who might be afraid to interact with you, to hear, to listen, even to simply say, “How are you?”: let’s talk about myself, who on October 7 had—and still has—three children in Israel who, fortunately, one way or another, were not in the southern part of the country, the scene of the massacre. Fortunately, they were a bit further north of Tel Aviv and, like the entire Israeli population, were confined for at least two weeks, waiting for the authorities to locate even the last terrorist who had infiltrated the country and was roaming freely.

About 5,000 people entered: some were already inside because, let us remind those who will read this book, until October 7, Tel Aviv allowed around 80,000 Gazans to enter Israel in the illusory hope—on the other side—that it didn’t matter which Israeli government had made such a decision, whether right-wing or left-wing, the illusion was that work and offering a future perspective to these 80,000 people might prevent them from being drawn into the clutches of Hamas and its terror. Unfortunately, this did not happen, as we know, and on October 7, many of the Palestinians who

were “commuters” acted as informants. They provided them, as the militias and fascist government did in Italy, with the addresses of the houses where the terrorists went to carry out massacres. The terrorists had such detailed lists that they were able to know the exact composition of each family (women, men, children, elderly). There is the story of a small town near Be’er Sheva, Ofakim²² where it was known that there was a family from a notoriously non-religious kibbutz (and mind you: when I say ‘non-religious’ they are usually the ones most active on the peace front) where a family had decided several months ago to embrace observance of Jewish precepts and rules in a more orthodox manner. They had the Shabat custom (and October 7 was Shabat) of leaving on Fridays and going to friends or relatives to spend it with them: they would go to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or other parts of Israel to breathe in the Shabat atmosphere, you know?

Yes.

On that day, the informant says to the terrorists who are carrying out the slaughter: ‘There’s no point in you entering this apartment because no one normally comes here anyway’. As chance would have it, that time that family decided to host friends and reciprocate the hospitality in that kibbutz: miraculously they all survived. So it was not an action carried out in this way, in the casual encounter between victims and executioners: and I said all this because – to get back to your question – we have had testimonies of affection, understanding, solidarity even from people one would not have expected. People who don’t shout, who don’t go and beat up policemen, who don’t storm RAI offices; and who

²² Ofakim is located 20 km west of Be’er Sheva. It was founded in 1955, today it has about 35,000 inhabitants.

somehow feel that they are on the right side, not because Israel is always right, but because Israel represents a model of values that are our values. Watch out while you and I are talking to each other! When I say “our values” I am European, Italian, Europeanist, and I add Roman and Romanist. And I say this in a very clear term so as not to be misunderstood: I am sick and tired of being told “your government,” because my government today is not Benjamin Netanyahu’s but Giorgia Meloni’s just as before it was Mario Draghi’s and, unfortunately, also Giuseppe Conte’s. This is because Israel and its soldiers are doing an important battle: just yesterday they sent me the video where an imam is preaching on TV saying, “What we started in Israel on October 7 we will end (don’t ask me why) in Andalusia, Spain, in Seville and Rome.” The Jews were driven out in 1492 by Isabella of Spain called the Catholic along with all the Muslims – they felt this sense of frustration with the outpost of Europe that was Spain at that time. And just now, I was speaking via videoconference with the Council Chamber in Syracuse, where there has been a strong presence of both Jewish and Muslim communities, and it also showcases much of the ancient Sicilian architecture.

Just look at Palermo.

Very good. That’s why I say ‘Israel is fighting for our values,’ because if Jerusalem falls, so does Rome, and by ‘Rome,’ I mean Western civilisation, its democracies, and the values we’ve spent so many years building — one example being the role of women. There’s *Still Tomorrow (C’è ancora domani)*, a beautiful film – for those who enjoy it – by Paola Cortellesi, which is subtle, romantic in some ways, though undeniably bitter. The surprise ending reveals the protagonist, Delia,

who remains faithful despite her abusive husband, deciding to embrace the idea that women should be allowed to vote²³. So I ask myself: all those battles fought in Italy and Europe for women’s right to vote and for divorce (which, in practice, often disadvantaged women), divorce that, according to Jewish tradition, is not only permitted but also required when the love relationship ends. There is no ‘Til death do you part’ formula, and marriage does not carry the same sanctity. We’ve fought battles over abortion: I’m not anti-abortion in a fanatical or fundamentalist sense. I do believe, however, that abortion should not be used as a means of preventing pregnancies — but that’s just my personal opinion, as someone who has had four children and lost one. And in accordance with the sanctity of life as per Jewish tradition, if a childbirth endangers the mother’s life, an abortion should be performed without hesitation. Just as we have advanced in our civilisation, the one shaped by Rome in the broadest sense, so too have we made strides in civil rights, particularly in matters like de facto unions, and more. Everyone lives their sexual life according to their own beliefs and preferences, if I may say: however, we have also achieved this. It seems strange that, after listing all these things, I now add one more that really bothers me: the fact that we — especially we Jews — have given (and I use this term deliberately, without error), we have given you, with great suffering — and I say this with anger, having made 22 visits to the extermination camps at Auschwitz and Birkenau, accompanying hundreds, even thousands of students from all over Italy, but especially from Rome and Lazio, along with Holocaust survivors. These survivors, before, during, and after these trips, gave you their testimony, which some very

²³ Delia, in fact, goes to great lengths to vote in the Institutional Referendum on June 2-3, 1946.

malicious people have interpreted as an attempt to play the victim or to move the audience to tears, as if to present us as saints. As I often repeat when I speak in schools, paraphrasing Golda Meir's conversation with Pope Paul VI in 1970 — when Palestinian claims were just starting, Samaria and Judea were under Jordanian control, and Gaza under that of Egypt — he asked her, 'But you, who have suffered so much, how can you, this people of saints, be so harsh with the Palestinians?' And Golda Meir replied, "The saints all died in the crematoria of Auschwitz and Birkenau." So no, we are not saints. But to continue my point, we have had survivors who have given us their testimonies, who have returned again and again, both mentally — in their minds — and physically, still doing so with their last efforts despite illness, age, and Covid, to guide institutions, young people, and youth in developing the resilience to prevent what we never want to see again. And I use this example to highlight how criminal we all were to them — sadistic criminals who used their testimonies to build our sense of humanity. And I ask myself this (I humbly ask the survivors' forgiveness for a comparison that may seem sacrilegious): would you, as a journalist, an author, a citizen, a man, ever allow yourself to ask a woman who has been raped by one or more men to come back and recount it? To talk about what it was like? Or perhaps we engage in a great exercise that has led to the establishment of medical schools in psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry, because such an experience can indeed drive you mad...

Primo Levi killed himself for it.

Would we ever think of going to the victims of those rapes and asking them what it was like? Whether they liked it or not, whether they could recount it minute by minute, or

perhaps a line of doctors would do everything to help remove that memory so that the woman could return to having a normal sex life and healthy emotional relationships with future partners or husbands? We, to our survivors, like Edith Bruch, the Bucci sisters, and Liliana Segre, have no hesitation in asking for their testimonies. That whole world, that entire political spectrum — which, unfortunately, today belongs to the 'center-left' — is the same one that immediately condemns a neo-fascist, like in the case of the scandal involving the Ponte Milvio branch of Fratelli d'Italia youth who deny the Holocaust. But when Holocaust denial occurs systematically, for instance in Gaza, Ramallah, Tehran, Damascus, Cairo, and Amman, where it appears in their textbooks (and in the case of Palestinians, textbooks funded by the European Union)... so, on one hand, we create Holocaust museums (I am the founder of the upcoming Holocaust Museum in Rome), and on the other, we spend enormous sums of money, yet when Palestinians deny the Holocaust, is it their right? Let's be clear: if women are flogged to death and tortured in the prisons of Tehran or by Hamas because a lock of hair slips out from under the veil they are wearing (whether willingly or not), the ideology remains the same, but it gets less attention. Or take homosexuals, those scoundrels who, on Gay Pride day — a demonstration I've never sympathised with, as many of my friends who fought their battles as homosexuals have told me: some are still alive, others are not. I can mention names like Angelo Pezzana²⁴, founder of the Italy-Israel

²⁴ Angelo Pezzana (Santhià, 1940), Italian activist, politician, journalist, and intellectual known for his commitment to LGBTIQ+ rights and for being one of the founders of *Fuori!*, the first revolutionary homosexual movement in Italy born in 1971. Source: <https://www.gay.it/personaggi/attivismo/angelo-pezzana>

Friendship Associations and a great fighter for Israel's right in our country, or Wicky Hassan²⁵ of blessed memory, one of the great fashion minds who created the jeans for the Energie brand. They were homosexuals and didn't like Gay Pride: it's a strong statement, but these homosexuals prevented Jewish LGBT organizations, like the Keshet Italia²⁶ group, from marching with them at the last Gay Pride, not just because they weren't welcome, but because their safety couldn't be guaranteed. This is despite the fact that Palestinian homosexuals from Gaza and Ramallah seek asylum in Israel (and get it) because they know there would be no future for them in Gaza or Ramallah if their homosexuality was discovered; or they flee because they fear being tied up and executed just as they acted dishonorably when, on both Women's Days — 8 March and 25 November, against violence towards women — they stopped Jewish women from sharing the stories of rapes committed against them a month earlier. These testimonies are not only recorded by the women who survived or were kidnapped and later freed by Hamas, but also by the GoPro cameras worn by the Palestinian terrorists

²⁵ Vittorio Hassan, aka Wicky (1955-2011): born in Libya, forced to emigrate after the Six-Day War in 1967, a Jewish man who became an Italian citizen. He was behind the launch of successful fashion brands such as Energie and Miss Sisty. Before his death he claimed the right to marry his lifelong partner.

²⁶ Magen David Keshet Italia (MDKI) was formed in Rome on 1 July, 2015. It brings together LGBT Jews, mostly members of the Jewish Community of the Capital. The group aims to promote and support the LGBT community both in general and within the Jewish sphere. It also organises social and community activities related to Jewish tradition and offers support to LGBT Jews in Italy. Source: <https://www.ugei.it/ebrei-e-omosessuali-ecco-magen-david-keshet-primo-gruppo-ebraico-lgbt-in-italia>

who broke in. Here, feminists have blocked this narrative: and this entire world, with which we've fought against Holocaust denial, for the values of our Constitution, and for countless other things... they allow themselves to march with a world that forbids all of this? Do you know what kind of march Hezbollah uses? The goose step!

Indeed.

When I was president of the Roman Jewish Community — I mention this because at the time I had a strong relationship with Rome's mayor, Gianni Alemanno, which led to some criticism — we organised Memory trips together, and he posted a photo of Gilad Shalit²⁷, the first person kidnapped shortly after the Israeli army withdrew from Gaza. I'd like to remind your readers: there isn't a single square centimetre of territorial dispute with the Gaza Strip, yet they kidnapped Gilad Shalit, attempted to enter Israeli territory multiple times, and have fired an unknown number of missiles since 2015... I recall how Alemanno told me, "By now, I keep my right hand in my pocket and salute with my left, because I don't want anyone to confuse it with a fascist salute when I raise my right hand." So, this is where we've ended up: fine, thank you, perfect! All right, we did it together, we were ridiculous together: we take responsibility for it. The same people allow

²⁷ Gilad Shalit (1986), an IDF corporal, was captured by Palestinian militia in Kerem Shalom, not far from the Gaza Strip, on 25 June 2006. For his release, Hamas demanded the release of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. The agreement was reached only in October 2011, with Gilad released first, followed by 1,027 Palestinian prisoners over the next two months. Shalit, once free, said he was treated well in captivity and expressed his desire to see the peace process concluded soon. Source: <https://www.ugei.it/ebrei-e-omosessuali-ecco-magen-david-keshet-primo-gruppo-ebraico-lgbt-in-italia>

the goose step and fascist salute of an ideology that denies all the achievements that are the legacy of the left: these are Nazi-Maoists in my view, who fuel hatred, with followers who, unbeknownst to them, are also fools. We follow them, their profiles are constantly monitored according to Italian law, both by law enforcement and by people they themselves encourage to follow their daily proclamations, in which they not only advocate for Palestinian rights and the right to a Palestinian state but also spread anti-Jewish hate material — the most perverse kind, which we thought had been buried after the ashes of Auschwitz and Birkenau. Material about the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, claiming the Jewish people control the world: we control it so much that all UN resolutions are against Israel, yet there is no resolution against Iran — the same Iran that chairs the UN Commission on Human Rights. It is like giving the presidency of the National Blood Service to Count Dracula.

If there were no dead people, there would indeed be much to laugh about.

May I say... A cartoon should be made of each of the most absurd things we are witnessing. Then, I think we are facing this so-called world turned upside down, where, instead, it is the men, children of a right-wing culture, in some cases fascist, who do not deny it and it has been part of their past. And many of them (especially those in power) have renounced it by condemning fascism as an accomplice of Nazism, co-author of the extermination of the Jews... but we are at the paradox that it is they, today, who are the champions of defending Israel's right to exist and defend itself. You know what I mean? That's why I say we are facing the absurd, but — and so I return to your question — we must be careful

because, I repeat, in my opinion, there is (and I say this with utmost conviction) a silent majority — including people from the left, to be clear: never generalise — who are with us and to whom we want to say thank you. Now, however, is the time to figure out what we can and must do because, surely, we must turn over a new leaf.

I would like to ask you two things, though. The first: in the course of this book I have heard so many testimonies, such as that of Fiona Diwan who told me about the mailing of the Bulletin of the Jewish Community of Milan that she directed, which was sent in anonymous envelopes because in some apartment buildings there is a risk of listing the recipients as Jews or pro-Israel; I have listened to Elisabetta Fiorito, who was challenged in Florence for her biography of Golda Meir; we have seen pro-Israel women accused of being fascists and driven out of the 8 March demonstrations. On the one hand, I ask her: how did we end up in a nightmare like 1938, because all that is missing is that people go at night and write *Juden* on store windows like in Hitler's Germany...

I disagree. I 100% disagree with this reading, although I understand it. This is not 1938: I say this with an ornament of pride. I was appointed *Commendatore al merito della Repubblica Italiana* (Commander of Merit of the Italian Republic) and therefore I can boast of wearing the symbol of this honour conferred by the Presidency of the Republic. There were no Jewish Commendatori and we are not at the time when those who were then have been deprived of their honorary titles like my grandfather: I have in my office the picture with the Honor of Cavaliere granted to him by Victor Emmanuel III and taken away again by Victor Emmanuel

III with the racial laws. No one can take away my title of Commendatore unless I engage in bad conduct, and I'm not a saint (laughs): however, I disagree and I say that, if we live in a country where the Minister of the Interior is evaluating, in accordance with the rules of our Constitution, that allows every citizen to protest (as those who want to march on 5 October would like to do), I say – as I have privately told him – that the dividing line is not judging and fearing being attacked by the so-called Nazi-Maoist left, which I hope has no sympathisers in Parliament To date, I haven't heard similar arguments, except from some idiots, even though I sometimes hesitate with some of them, but the issue here is: would you and I allow neo-Nazis on 27 January to honour the resistance of the Nazi army against the Russians at the entrance to Auschwitz? Or, as we did a few months ago when we celebrated the Normandy landings, could we allow the German Army to celebrate the resistance – and they did resist – of the Wehrmacht against the Allies? No, it wouldn't even be conceivable: these people should go home and get it. The issue is not the right to protest, of course! The issue is that if tomorrow I wanted to demonstrate for the right to rape women or engage in child trafficking or whatever, or retrace the ideology of Nazi extermination, they would pick me up at home and I would be subjected to an ex-officio court case without the need for a party complaint. So I think that right now I still feel protected by a country where it has been made clear that if they want to demonstrate on the eve of October 7, they technically do it on the 5th which is Saturday and the 7th is Monday and it would be more difficult to mobilise the masses, I understand that as well and I am calm about it. And if they were to demonstrate, despite the fact that I've been under protection for four months because of

the threats that some moron is making against me (and it's not just one, but it's gone viral) I say: I don't give a damn, I'm not afraid because I feel protected by my country that not only granted me the protection of men at a cost to the state, I would like to make that clear. I have already lived under protection for 12 years, when I was president: if you want, I can send you the letter I sent to the then Chief of Police Franco Gabrielli²⁸ asking to stop the escort service because I believed that, after my term, I still had – and still have – ongoing legal cases against dangerous individuals, people who have even beaten up ordinary people for a few coins in a telephone booth. In short, people who have no scruples: but, going back to the demonstration on 5 October, I am not afraid and I have already told the men in my escort that if they parade I will be there and the problem will be theirs, not mine. Will they demonstrate? I will too, that's all right: if they are forbidden to do so, however, it will be another matter, because I know that the moment they try to do so they will be arrested. Since we live in a country that has returned to its Jewish citizens their rights and they are largely established, I am not afraid and fortunately – I would add – Rome (like Milan), Italy is not France. Because the pride of the French is what led to the fact that, despite having all the intelligence information to know that what eventually happened at the

²⁸ Franco Gabrielli (born in Viareggio, 1960), after graduating in Law, became an officer in the State Police, later working for the DIGOS (Political Police) in Imperia and Florence, and then becoming the head of the DIGOS for the Rome Police Headquarters. A Prefect since 2006, from that year to 2008 he headed SISDE, which later became AISI (Italian security service). He became chief of police in 2016. Source: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/franco-gabrielli/?search=Gabrielli%2C%20Franco%2F>

school in Toulouse²⁹ could occur, they still let it happen when someone entered and carried out a massacre of children and their teachers, wearing a GoPro camera. Or those who did the Bataclan or the Charlie Hebdo attack, and we can go on. Here, the French continue to limit themselves to guarding Jewish places of worship because they still think – poor fools! – that France has some immunity, despite the fact that, unfortunately, there are masses of people roaming around hunting for Jews. In Paris, they not only advise taking off the kippah (which I've never taken off: I will return on September 22nd and continue to wear it), but French Jews are also removing their mezuzahs³⁰, which are a symbol of blessing placed on the doorposts of Jewish homes worldwide,

²⁹ This refers to the 19 March 2012 Toulouse massacre that struck the Ozar Hatorah school, where at 8 a.m. a 23-year-old Frenchman of Algerian descent riding a scooter shot and killed four people (a teacher and three children) while seriously wounding a teenager. The killer, Muhammed Merah (who had already struck in Montauban on 11 and 15 March, killing a total of three military personnel and wounding a fourth), was killed by police after a 30-hour siege as he tried to escape by jumping off the balcony of his apartment. It was discovered that he was known for acts of thuggery and had been reported to intelligence after trips to Afghanistan and Pakistan where he had trained in weapons handling, along with other trips to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and beyond. The Toulouse murders were claimed by the Al Qaeda-affiliated *Jund al-Kilafah* (Soldiers of the Caliphate) organisation. In the press release Merah was referred to as Youssef-al-Firansi (Youssef the Frenchman), a nickname the man used during his training. All of which, moreover, Paris intelligence knew about. Source: <https://www.shalom.it/cultura/dieci-anni-dalla-strage-di-tolosa-ricordo-e-riflessioni-b1112581/>

³⁰ *Mezuzah* (plural: *mezuzot*) is a wooden or metal case containing a scroll with a prayer, the presence of which is sometimes evidenced by a notch on the stone of the doorpost. It is attached on the doorpost of the synagogue door as well as Jewish houses, source [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sinagoga_\(Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sinagoga_(Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale)/)

out of fear, and they are erasing any signs that a mezuzah had been there. So I think I still live in a country that guarantees my rights and I tell any journalist who is interviewing me: I know where to go, you don't. When it gets bad I know where to go, he or she doesn't. And I don't have an Israeli passport, but Israel was also born for this: we went to bring Jews from Ethiopia, from Yemen... let's try to imagine what would have become of the Yemeni Jews in the hands of the Houthis today, but Israel has already taken them with the famous Operation Magic Carpet in the 1950s³¹. The theme is that Europe has not understood what is in store for it: and I will give you an example. I am going to purposely spend, most likely, the money for the matters related to the Synagogue that I have the privilege of leading in Rome at a Bangladeshi Muslim fruit vendor with a hijab who is always very kind to me, even though she sees me wearing my kippah, along with her husband and children. One day she saw me when it was pouring rain and I was walking during Shabat and she – who was going into her store – wanted to give me her umbrella to shelter me. I'm happy about that: so I don't think that all Muslims are against us, I think instead that many of them have realised what the model is in which they can quietly raise their children, and that they would probably never go back to their country because they know that they would not enjoy anything they are enjoying here. But there are others who are just as dangerous and need to be put in a position where they can do no harm: and I am not of those who like

³¹ Operation Flying Carpet took place between June 1949 and September 1950: out of 51,000 Yemeni Jews, 50,000 came to live in Israel. The first massive exodus of Jews from Yemen to Ottoman Palestine had already taken place between 1880 and 1914. Source: <https://www.ugei.it/esodi-ebraici-sul-tappeto-volante-dallo-yemen-verso-israele>

the idea of a deportation warrant, because as we deport them from Italy they go off to Spain, Greece or any other country in the world to commit crimes and maybe do even worse things. You know what I mean?

Yes.

No, I am not afraid, and we are not in that condition. We still need to have the pride and strength to hold our heads high. I know a Jewish man who fled Libya and is now almost 80 years old. He survived the Libyan pogroms, during which Jewish mothers and sisters were raped. This is why 4,000 Libyan Jews were welcomed into Italy, many of whom chose Italy because they had studied Italian, and the country accepted them. This friend told me: "In moments of great tension, remember that we Jews must wear the Shabbat garment because Saturday is the day we put on our finest attire, with our heads held high." Riccardo, with our heads held high! "We must not be ashamed, we must not hide" and I think the most moving experience I have ever had was on October 8. It seems strange: and then the 15th, and then every Saturday after that. It would have been understandable to see our synagogues empty, perhaps without mothers and children, confined at home because Gaza had declared they would strike us anywhere, as Yahya Sinwar, newly elected leader of Hamas just a month ago, said.

Sinwar, the so-called hero, is the one who nevertheless asks Israel for a safe passage.

Yes, the same one who now allegedly wants a safe passage: our synagogues did not empty, and since 9 October 1982, I have led a synagogue dedicated to the memory of the child Stefano Gaj Taché, killed by a Palestinian commando on 9

October 1982. We said: we want a place of prayer where life and love prevail over hate; well, that synagogue – ours as well as all the synagogues in Rome – remained filled with the desire to pray, to continue, to be there. In Rome in '82 there were 5 synagogues, today we have 18: in their faces.

When will this war end? One of the things that emerged from interviewing those involved in the book, for example, Fiammetta Martegani, is the sense of uncertainty. Fiammetta for example was telling me from Tel Aviv that Israel today is a country that wakes up at the time of the attack and remembers that it is in a nightmare, but it is also a country in which people take to the streets and protest against Netanyahu, a country in which the families of the hostages are demanding negotiations to free them. At the same time, however, I fear that if Israel deals with Hamas and does not annihilate it tomorrow we will see another October 7 but multiplied by ten, by which time Hamas will have had time to recover. Yet the West fails to understand this necessity that Israel has for its own survival. And I see in Italy twenty-somethings, all leftists, protesting in universities because their universities should not cooperate with Israeli universities as they are guilty of genocide. Genocide: they have learned this word that drips blood and that the Jews have experienced on their skin along with the Armenians and so on.

Of course. And it was the lexicon of the Nuremberg Tribunal that coined it after the war. You know what I mean?

Of course And then, however, in Israel there are guys in their twenties, the same age as those in Italy, who instead of messing around at university are driving 70-ton

Merkava tanks and getting into the tunnels and risking their lives. Many of these people die so that I and many “armchair experts” can continue to express our opinions. Unfortunately, unlike me, these “armchair experts” sit down and write that Israel is evil, genocidal, that we should no longer support Jerusalem, and so on. Why does the West no longer understand this and is offering its neck to jihadism that will slit its throat?

First, let us go back to the demonstrations in Israel. That the parents of the hostages are asking for what they are asking for I think is absolutely normal. It doesn't hold up: if you knew your daughter was a hostage — not held by Americans, not imprisoned in a French or Swedish jail like in the case of Breivik, the one responsible for the massacre in Norway³², and we know the conditions he's benefiting from...

Of course: he's on holiday.

In the meantime, I would divide the two things up, if you'll allow me. And I'll say something else: if I lived in Israel I would not be with the protesters, certainly not. But I respect them, because among those protesters are those soldiers who, having finished their work in Gaza, then go to the square to demonstrate. There is a big difference: above all, I am proud of Israeli democracy because it is a democracy; and Israel is a country – the people of the International Court of Justice

³² Anders Behring Breivik is the perpetrator of the 22 July 2011 massacres in Norway, first in the capital Oslo and then on the island of Utoya. Sentenced in 2012 to 21 years in prison, the maximum penalty under Norwegian criminal law, Breivik has shown no repentance for the 77 people killed in total (not counting those injured). Source: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/utoya-e-oslo-strage-di_\(Lessico-del-XXI-Secolo\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/utoya-e-oslo-strage-di_(Lessico-del-XXI-Secolo)/)

in The Hague as well as those champions of our rights who march in Italy under the flags of the Nazi-Maoists or a certain left – that doesn't need to learn anything, starting from Italy. Because Israel, in spite of Likud's Olmert who was premier and before that mayor of Jerusalem, an outstanding person, a former general whom I had the pleasure of knowing, did a few years in jail for corruption. Israel's president Moshe Katsav, with whom I had the pleasure of having dinner at a restaurant when he came to Rome to speak at our synagogue, served several years in prison for having sexually assaulted one of his secretaries and had to resign. But do you see President Sergio Mattarella – who is a great worthy person, and I humbly apologise for the comparison – being tried, convicted without any extenuating circumstances and kicked out of office within 6 months? Olmert? And other important Israeli political figures? Israel has nothing to learn about the concept of democracy: the other day I was about to physically confront a journalist or so-called journalist who, in my opinion, in a mafioso manner (I hope he reads the book), after a discussion, dared to insult the Israeli army, saying “What we're doing and everything...” I said to him: “What are we doing? I am from Rome and a Romanist, open and close brackets.” “No, but I'm on the security committee, I'm worried about you...be careful.” I slapped him under the chin with a full hand and replied, “Be careful you! You don't understand anything about what awaits YOU if these should win,” and I added, “Do you see what the difference is? I am not standing here saying that Israeli soldiers do not commit crimes: of course they do! As the saying goes, they are human beings. And as Ben Gurion said at the birth of the State of Israel: ‘We will be an accomplished state when we have our thieves and our prostitutes and our criminals.’” And we

have them all: there are no saints in Israel, and it is likely that many boys – probably under stress, but no one excuses them because they can't suffer from stress – if they commit violence against a Palestinian detainee (mind you: guilty of massacres, torture, October 7 rape!) have been removed and sent to trial. Right now they are on trial, they have demoted them all and are stand-ing tri-al! There is a rumour going around that they used – it would seem – some Palestinian civilians to go into the tunnels to check first if there were any explosives or traps: the commander of the Israeli Army said that this is forbidden by the rules of engagement of the State of Israel, the only nation in the world that phones, texts, leaflets, Whatsapp, uses the best technology to tell Palestinians in Gaza, anywhere in the Strip, even those in Lebanon, “In 10 minutes we will bomb you, run away.”

It's true, I wrote about it in ItaliaOggi.

Right? The leaflets in Arabic on which it says to leave the area... but why, when the Palestinians launch missiles on us deliberately trying to hit towns and Jewish lives, and not as might be legitimate (from their point of view) military bases and soldiers, do they warn? “We are going to such and such a town, evacuate it”? An hour before they warn us? My children and others have always been saved by Israeli technology. This is a proposal I officially make to Riccardo Gualtieri, mayor of Rome: I say end this war, recruit Hamas engineers. Is there a path to recovery, to return to civilian life? Let's bring them to build the Metro in Rome: they will be much better at it than those who are doing it now and they will certainly take much less time. The Palestinians have used our money, that of the free world but also of the Arab monarchies and emirates to build tunnels and not societal progress in medicine, culture,

palaces, hospitals, or to remove the whole population from refugee camps. Does it seem normal to you that in 2024 despite the billions of dollars received since 1948, despite their refusal – in 1948 – to be born as a nation subverting the UN resolution of 1947 accepted instead by Israel, which provided for two neighbouring states, they have not been able to put these people in normal homes? But why are the Jews from Yemen or Libya staying here? The president of our community comes from a family that was defrauded of everything in Tripoli. There are people who landed in Italy, coming from Libya, with two cardboard suitcases and £5 which was what they could take with them. Five pounds! They slept for no more than 6 months, maximum a year, in “refugee camps” (as they were called) in Latina, Ostia, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, and then went on to build a normal life and rebuild it with their own strength, energy, intelligence, skills without the help of anyone but the hospitality that Italy gave them – and they are always grateful.

I still remember the mayor of Ladispoli telling me: we were a town of 10,000 people, and many had taken out mortgages for second homes that they then rented out to Roman vacationers in the 1970s, who went to Ladispoli on holiday. Then, at a certain point, they stopped coming to the town and people were desperate because they had to pay their mortgages. “At a certain point,” he told me, “we find, without anyone telling us anything, that thousands of people have taken to arriving. Hundreds of people from Russia came through, fleeing in the 1970s, and then in the 1990s after the collapse of communism. And Arab Jews, also in the 1970s.” And the mayor told me, “These people saved the economy of our town. At one point there were 12,000 Russian Jews and as many from Ladispoli, but the economy improved because

they worked for 24,000 people.” This is because the one who was making bread was doing it for 24,000, ditto the plumber, even the funeral home was working double, I mean – I’m joking if I say that all the necessities of life were doubled. And the rents were paid by the philanthropic American Joint³³ organisations to the landlords in Ladispoli – they did it for 10-15 years and saved these people’s mortgages!

Instead, there is still a UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNWRA, in Gaza: there are refugees from all over the world followed by UNHCR, and then there are Palestinians who have UNWRA...

...which has the electricity meter connected to the Hamas tunnels.

Absolutely.

Which, again, if it weren’t for the deaths would be laughable.

Absolutely. And then I’ll tell you something: maybe we should worry more – and here there’s also some idiocy, I’m not judging but I do think about it. I’m not afraid of ghettos, but if they create buses for Jews in London, do we want to laugh and smile? Do you know about this story?

³³ The Joint, that is, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is the largest Jewish humanitarian organisation in the world. The Joint’s purpose in Israel is to promote quality of life and equal opportunity for all by narrowing socioeconomic gaps in Israeli society. Founded in 1914, the Joint operates in 70 countries around the world, providing a safety net for Jews in need, strengthening and building Jewish communities, and providing aid and rescue in times of crisis and disaster. Source: <https://www.thejoint.org.il/en/>

No, I’m hearing about it now.

Go and have a look, it’s been talked about for ten days now.

Look, I’m seeing it now on the BBC website³⁴. We really are in an upside-down world.

Unable to guarantee the safety of Jewish citizens and even more so of religious citizens because they are even more easily identified, the Mayor of London, with the security authorities of his municipality, decides to create a Jewish-only bus.

Route 310, I read on the BBC. I swear, I’m feeling out of touch.

Then I ask a question: is that meant to prevent racist attacks against Jews? And if they had done it for Muslims, would those scoundrels, the so-called ‘pacifists’ as Angelo Pezzana, the leader of the homosexual rights struggles in Italy and founder of FUORI, called them 40 years ago, have taken to the streets? To these scoundrels of today, I say go and see how those battles began, where the homosexual world was fully aligned with the Jews. Because we, on Remembrance Day, do not like to say that Nazism was a problem of the Jews and that January 27 is the day of the Jews, but of all the victims all of Nazism/fascism.

³⁴ The news is from 3 September: London Mayor Sadiq Khan has launched a trial bus route in north London to help Jewish Londoners feel “safe when they travel”. The 310 bus runs every 20 minutes between Stamford Hill and Golders Green: it was launched, reports the BBC, in response to long-standing calls from London’s Jewish community over the past 16 years for a bus to connect with the city’s neighbourhoods. Incidentally, according to the London Metropolitan Police, 2,065 anti-Semitic hate crimes were recorded in the British capital from October 2023 to July 2024. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20l26mj14mo>

And I ask another question: some say ‘they have ghettoized us,’ but that’s the least of it! They have made us a much easier target, because before, if they wanted to target Jews on a bus, maybe they knew there were four on board, they would kill another 20 people and that was that. Today, instead, we know that if someone takes the 310 bus, as you’re telling me it’s the 310, they’re going straight for the target!

There’s even a timetable on it!

I’ll ask you another question. Who checks that those who get on the bus are actually Jewish? Do they pull down the little boys’ underwear?

I didn’t want to say it but I was wondering the same thing.

Not only that: but even if they pull them down, being Muslims they too would be circumcised like us and so we would not solve the problem. And how do you prevent this? Do you know that some of the attacks carried out in Israel and some attempted in some of the capitals of the Western free world had Muslim attackers disguised as Orthodox Jews? And do you know that today in no community in the world do you enter a synagogue unless you have shown your passport in advance and therefore you cannot enter and pray? If we don’t know who he is, where he comes from and we aren’t certain that he is one of us, he doesn’t come in. Even if searched. He doesn’t come in, because they are also able to disguise themselves: and the solution is a bus? I am concerned about this solution, which is the identical solution born from a perverse vision of the freedom to manifest one’s religious beliefs: do you know that in London there are areas where, after crossing a street, you enter under Sharia jurisdiction? In other words: disputes between neighbours I

know, of parking, one not paying another, a scam, whatever, given the high density of Muslim citizens one prefers not to have the state intervene through the civil courts and submits, having crossed that boundary with well-marked stripes, to the Islamic courts. And there it prevails, in London, in the heart of the cradle of Western civilisation, the one that gave democracy to the world well before the United States of America!

I don’t know if we are understanding this concept, but if five years ago they took such a measure, should I be surprised that they also made the absurd decision about the bus? That’s what I’m concerned about: I’m saying that the sacrifice of October 7 – and I’m saying this because we’re going to go on in spite of October 7, because if we were able to... my grandfather, Rabbi Riccardo Pacifici³⁵ who was Chief Rabbi in Genoa, who I never knew and whose name I bear, was deported and tortured. And my grandmother, who was captured and deported while she was a refugee in a convent as a result of a denunciation, so those who snitched also got the prize money, died in Birkenau. I think my grandfather, while he was entering the gas chambers, could never have imagined that his son would later be saved inside a convent of the nuns of Santa Marta in Settignano, then the State of Israel would be

³⁵ Rav Riccardo Reuven Pacifici was born in Florence in 1904; Deputy Rabbi of Venice between 1928 and 1930, he was then appointed Director of the Rabbinical College of Rhodes in 1932 where he remained until 1936. Chief Rabbi of Genoa between September 1936 and 1943, he visited the Ferramonti di Tarzia (CS) Internment Camp in March 1942 to comfort the inmates and celebrate some marriages. He would make this visit twice more before his arrest in Genoa in November 1943 and deportation to Auschwitz, where he was killed on arrival on 11 December 1943. His wife was Wanda Abenaim. Source: <http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/persone/detail/person-5991/wd.html>

born and then all the communities would be resurrected and today there is a grandson named after him and he has headed at least four grandchildren and today 15 great-grandchildren, you know what I mean? If we survived 6 million dead – I say this with my heart clenching – we can go on even after 1,200 dead and 5,000 tortured and murdered. No one talks about the suicides of the Nova Festival survivors, about the fact that all the Israeli psychotherapists say how after these events a new field of psychiatric and psychological medicine has opened up in which they themselves are direct or indirect victims, through stories, of such enormous things impossible to handle in a human way. That is: we are statistically used to saying that there will be a certain number of deaths and that a certain number of coffins will need to be built, but under Covid we realised that we went into a meltdown; yet in Italy, there are 60 million inhabitants, and at a certain point, we saw the columns of trucks, and in New York, they were burying people in mass graves. Just before Covid could we have imagined something so apocalyptic?

No.

And a metropolis of 10 million people can't handle the impact of – what do I know – a thousand deaths a day, 500 a day? No, because we didn't have the factories ready to produce the coffins. And so in Israel, psychiatrists say they are unable to provide therapy to everyone: there aren't enough doctors, and what their eyes have witnessed and their bodies have endured (some of the survivors from the Nova Festival were left mutilated, castrated, though no one talks about it) is so absurd as to be unforeseeable. So, we will survive, and I want to insist on shifting the perspective: I don't want to mourn my dead out of modesty in front of others. I don't care; I

couldn't care less, to put it bluntly. I am concerned about the fact that here, in my country, Italy, we lack the defences to combat this phenomenon; and we have idiots who, one day, fight for women's rights and march in the neighbourhoods of Rome if homosexuals are beaten up, but say nothing if the same are hogtied, killed, buried, or left to die slowly with their heads sticking out of the sand while ants and animals slowly devour them—because that's the death homosexuals deserve in Gaza. But if the Palestinians do it, everything's fine: yesterday, someone sent me a video of a TV debate featuring two guests, one of whom was clearly pro-Muslim. The first speaker begins by talking about a country where there's apartheid, 40,000 deaths, and all the rest... The pro-Palestinian's applause turns to surprise when the first guest tells him: "Hold on, I'm not talking about the Palestinians but about Muslim deaths along the Pakistan-India border," which no one cares about because they aren't Palestinians—and they're dying even today. So are the Kurds: do we want to move on? Then I think, and that's why I want to change the scenario: I say this with folded hands, we should not let our enemies dictate our agenda so they can enjoy our tears. We don't exhibit bodies: if we did, it was rarely and in private gatherings because it is impossible to show how they extirpated female sex organs, how they mutilated women before killing them. The video exists, mind you! We are not talking about things told but filmed, like the pregnant woman whose belly is opened and the foetus is put next to her and she faints. One can ask: is it over? No! One of the terrorists comes, throws a bucket of water in her face to revive her and enjoy the screams, moans, suffering and pain of seeing herself and her baby like this. This is what they are and this is what they would do to us in Rome, Milan, Turin,

inside any university if they see a woman in short shorts, you know what I mean? So they can all go to hell.

May I ask you something to conclude this conversation, thanking you for speaking with your heart? All the more reason, I always end these conversations by saying *Am Israel Chai*—Israel lives—and I don't say it out of flattery, but because I truly believe it. And so: is there anything that gives us hope in this hell?

Of course there is! We will win this war, we will win it with the weapons of truth, full stop. And we will win it because an important process has been interrupted, that of the Abraham Accords, the most important agreement with Saudi Arabia, which is not a champion of civil rights but is eager to re-enter our world, progressively, in its own time. They are opening up to the free world; they have understood that investing solely in the leverage of oil is not enough and have realised that wealth can also be created through tourism, the global market, and football—even though things haven't been going too well for them lately, as Dybala stayed at Roma and turned down Saudi money, if I'm not mistaken. Joking aside, we will win because the Abraham Accords will prevail: if, in these months, as recently as three weeks ago, a Saudi woman has been arrested for displaying the Palestinian flag, it means something is changing. And as I said in my speech made at the Syracuse Council Chamber, we have to be concerned about restoring a future for Palestinian children in Gaza. We must address this because I'm using a direct example, and I say this without hypocrisy or irony: if you, as a parent, take a 10- or 11-year-old child to carry out a massacre on October 7 — there are images of this, you know — and encourage them to participate in a massacre in Israel, alongside their parents,

assigning children the task of beheading Israeli infants... that child has been taught hatred, there's no doubt about it. But what would we do to parents who teach, not necessarily to behead a child, but what would you have done if you found out your child was going around beheading dogs or cats in the neighbourhood?

I would have given them such a thrashing that they'd forget their own name.

Right? The members of Hamas took their children to carry out these massacres and brought them back home as heroes: that means it is a sick society, where those children, as long as they remain there, will have no hope. We have to help them by freeing them from those dogs, from those beasts – and mind you, dogs would not be able to do what Hamas terrorists have done, dogs kill out of hunger and not out of hatred – and restore hope to those Palestinian children. We must do this by helping them understand that another world exists beyond the one in which they were raised. And if we take (I'm using a very strong word) children who, in our democracies, live with mothers who are prostitutes or are the children of drug dealers in prison and therefore unable to educate them, and they are placed into care... let's take all these children, bring them into our democracies. Let's help them to graduate, to have a chance to do some profession by becoming doctors, soccer players, what do I know, engineers, artists, fruit vendors, excellent labourers... we have to make them recover from the shock, from being forced, because a child at 10 years old doesn't think of doing such a thing, doesn't give birth to it from his mind. It's impossible, it's against nature, right?

Exactly.

We must give hope, and this is what the Nazi-Maoists in our democracies should do: help these children and do it through the Abraham Accords. Now we should imagine what the future of Gaza will be: certainly, there will be a transitional period in which Israel will have to control all the borders, from the one with Egypt – through which, as we have seen, everything and more was passing – to the one with Israel, and within Gaza, leave militias from the armies of the Abraham Accords nations who can guarantee the Palestinians (as was already planned in the Abraham Accords) a hope. And I say this very clearly, I don't shy away from it: I have no problem saying that perhaps a Palestinian state could be born, but not in place of the State of Israel, rather alongside it, with borders recognised by each other and born on the basis of normal and civilised democracy. We certainly cannot give birth to yet another theocracy in this fiery Middle East where we see that there is a world (see Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, etc.) that have realised that there is another world on which to build a coexistence that my father – who died 10 years ago – could never have imagined. In fact, I read some of his memoirs, notes he had at home while I was putting his bookcase back together. He used to say, “How beautiful it would be if two great worlds could cooperate with each other.” This is the project.

Thank you. And if I may say: *Am Israel Chai*.

Thank you, thank you. *Am Israel Chai*.

Note

Like all those born and raised in a Catholic country (and moreover in a small town of 30,000 inhabitants in the deep South), in the early years of my life, I had little to no contact with Judaism. I knew from the Catechism that Jews were those who continued to live in expectation of the Messiah and had not recognised Jesus Christ as such, and I knew that they had undergone a tremendous ordeal: the industrial annihilation, knowingly planned and rigorously executed, by the Nazis in World War II with the Shoah. They had been given the opportunity to create a state for themselves after the war because of the pains they had suffered but this had led them to confrontation with the surrounding Arab countries since 1948, the date of the proclamation of the State of Israel. That was more or less how things were going until, while studying Canon Law at the University, the documents of the Second Vatican Council opened a new perspective for me: the Jews were not guilty of the crucifixion of Christ, they were our elder brothers and sisters, and the Catholic Church, back in 1965 with the *Nostra Aetate* declaration, had clearly condemned the Holocaust as genocide. Even more: a Polish Pope named Karol Wojtyła, also known as Saint John Paul II, had visited the Synagogue of Rome in 1986 and was received by Rabbi Elio Toaff, one of the most magnificent figures of a Jew and patriot that the history of this country has ever known. I remember a photo, seen I think in *Famiglia Cristiana*, taken at the end of the visit: there are Wojtyła and Toaff looking upward, someone had photographed them probably from the gallery of the Synagogue. They are tired but happy, you can really breathe an image of brotherhood. A very powerful picture.

In 1993, I had started the fourth year of middle school when, in Vibo Valentia, they took us to the Cinetatro Valentini to see *Schindler's List* with Liam Neeson. Back then, I didn't pay attention, but today I realize how the signs of current stupidity and bias were already there: sitting on the wooden chairs of the Valentini, when the Nazi insignia pinned to the lapel of Schindler/Neeson was shown at the beginning of the film, a group of idiots burst into applause. This was echoed by a second round of applause when, in the finale, the Soviets appeared to liberate the concentration camp. Yeah: what about the Holocaust? What about the punch in the stomach that that film was then and still is? I would like to ask them 30 years later.

Still with Judaism: in March 2000, I was about to turn twenty when Wojtyla, who also had Jewish friends like Jerzy Kluger ("Karol could have started at General Motors as a messenger boy and become its president," he once said, half-joking), had the opportunity to perform an extraordinary act of what he called "purification of memory": on Sunday, 12 March of that year, he delivered a homily in which, in paragraph 4, he stated: "We forgive and ask for forgiveness! " While we praise God (...), we cannot fail to recognise the infidelities to the Gospel in which certain of our brothers and sisters have incurred, especially during the second millennium. We ask forgiveness for the divisions that have occurred among Christians, for the use of violence that some of them have made in the service of the truth, and for the attitudes of distrust and hostility assumed at times toward the followers of other religions." Among these followers were also the Jews, whom certain traditionalist groups still call "perfidious" despite Saint John XXIII having abolished this expression in 1962.

Judaism had thus been a subject of study or cultural interest until that time. Until one day, while talking, my father told the story of his arrival in Canada: when he arrived in Toronto, he said, no one wanted to give him a job. It was a Jew, Joe Cohen, who took him in "like a son" and put him to work in his bakery in Toronto. My father learned how to make bagels (and it became clear to me why, when it came to working in front of an oven for bread and similar products, he knew how to move with perfect timing), and he began to build a future in the country that he would later become a citizen of. It was, almost by coincidence, 1965: my father had Jewish friends, attended their parties, and knew their professionals. He would tell the story of his discovery, while his dentist, Dr. Gubermann, was implanting a gold molar, of a tattoo. "What's that number?" he had asked. The doctor was a Holocaust survivor; he had been in a concentration camp and had also faced the risk of annihilation. Then Joe Cohen died, "And what did you do?," I had asked him, "I went to the funeral, with all the relatives who came from all over the world. They were praying to God, and so was I," he replied. He lost his job and had to look for another one. The gratitude remained: to that was added my own. While all this was happening, something very curious was happening in Italy: until 2000, defending Israel was typically a left-wing stance, but gradually distinctions began to emerge: "I support Israel, but not Ariel Sharon," "The Holocaust is fine, but..." until, in 2006, Massimo D'Alema, then Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Italian government led by Romano Prodi, had the brilliant idea of going to Lebanon and climbing on a pile of rubble, arm in arm with a Hezbollah representative. The metamorphosis was complete, and from then on, being in favour of Israel – or standing by its side

when it is attacked – became a profession of fascism or, worse still, Nazism (which would be quite laughable if it weren't for the 6 million dead who deserve deep respect), when perhaps the only race in the world should be the human race. It was observed by a Jew, Albert Einstein, to be precise. Just saying. From my father's testimony and the encounter with Jewish friends, from learning about their world and the great honour that the members of the Roman Jewish Community later gave me by inviting me to attend Pope Francis' visit to the Synagogue, comes my respect and affection for Judaism and Israel. They are a country and a people who only ask to be recognised and to live in peace with others, and about whom in the West we actually know very little. And in putting these testimonies together, in following Jerusalem's struggle against Hamas, against violence inspired by the distorted use of religion, I feel a sense of anguish and sorrow at the brisk viciousness that surrounds Israel in the West today. How women born and raised in Western rights and freedoms can extol free Palestine and, that is, the victory of Hamas, a movement for which women are less than a tool, is a dark mystery to me. Or rather: it is a mystery evidently of ignorance and mystification, considering that the girls of Israel are walking around free, tough and fighting for their country. And they wouldn't want to die either, obviously, and they don't find anything glorious in blowing themselves up to kill people, which is also obvious. And yet it happens, it happens that guys in their 20s are put on a 70-ton Merkava wagon and sent to fight street by street, or inside some tunnel in the dark to risk their lives. And they risk it, and if appropriate die to give those who remain at home a chance to live peacefully and safely for years to come. Not very indirectly, also benefiting

from this struggle are we who are sitting comfortably on the couch in the West, selfishly convinced that none of this affects us.

There is a book that helps to understand Israel's determination, its sense of courage and sacrifice: *Six Days of War* by Michael Oren. I suggest reading it if only to remember a piece of history that has been forgotten, as indeed this society immersed in a perpetual present has forgotten the sense of the passage of time and, therefore, of History. The hopes of 1967, for a war that would put an end to the Middle Eastern conflicts, are the same as those of 1973, the Camp David Accords of 1978, Lebanon in 1982, the First Gulf War in 1990, the Intifadas, Operation Cast Lead, and so on, up to today. The hope, one day, to live in peace. That is also what Israel is fighting for.

With this, to finish, I do not want to praise war, as it is certainly not the only cleansing force in the world. And certainly, the world is not divided in a Manichean way: but in your opinion, between those who want the destruction of Israel to establish a kingdom of terror, misery, and death, and those who instead want to live in peace with all their neighbours, which side should one take?

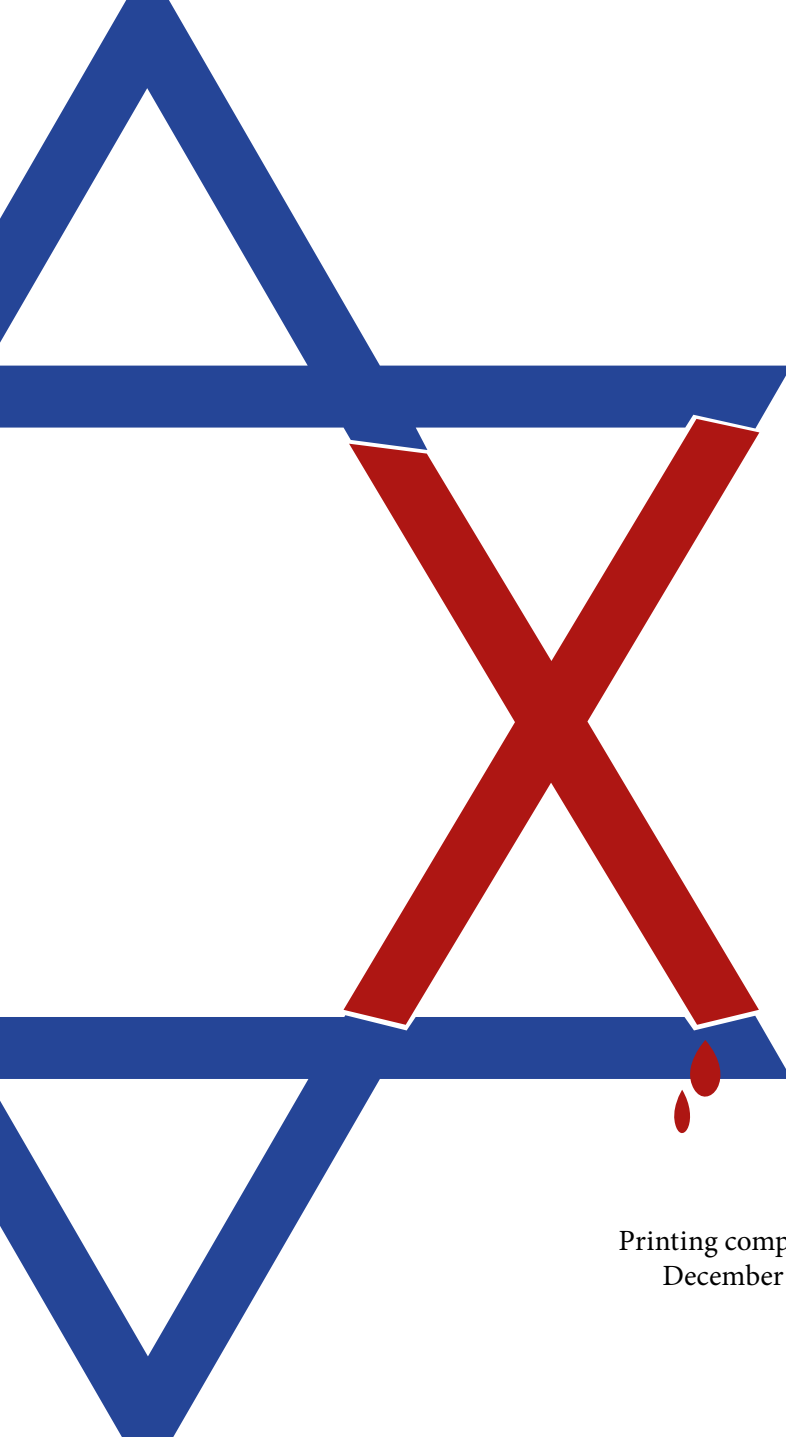
The answer is for you to decide. In this book (thanks to Anna Bonfrisco and the ID Foundation for helping me publish it, and thanks to Giovanni Sallusti, editor-in-chief of Radio Liberty, who amicably allowed me to publish the unabridged episodes of Zoom), I have only asked questions (thanks to all those who wanted to answer them) and I hope that this war will put an end ((alas, a naive hope) to all wars in the Middle East. *Am Israel Chai*, Israel lives!

Antonino D'Anna, 19 September 2024

Antonino D'Anna

(Vibo Valentia, 1980)

Professional journalist since 2008. A degree in Law from the Cattolica University of Milan, he began writing on the Milanese news of Avvenire in 2004. He then worked at Affaritaliani.it, has collaborated for twenty years with ItaliaOggi and directed Miracoli Settimanale and founded Il Garage de L'Alfista. Since 2020 he has worked for Radio Libertà, where he hosts Zoom – Il drive time in mezzo ai fatti, awarded as Km Zoom together with Lorenzo Viviani with the 2024 Golden Microphone, in the Environment category. He has written about ten books and has dealt with the Vatican, foreign affairs, current affairs and economics.



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