

Persona Non Grata in Israel: Do you have to Die to become a Hero: Vittorio Arrigoni was never more alive as he is now

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Egidia Beretta Arrigoni, Mother of Vittorio Arrigoni – Manifesto April 17, 2011

“As of now, his lively presence which is evergrowing by the hour, is like a wind which from Gaza, his beloved Mediterranean Sea, is blowing wildly and bringing us his hopes and his love for those without a voice, for the weak, the suppressed, bearing us witness.”

Do you have to die to become a hero, to be on the front page of the newspaper, to watch TV even outside the home or to die in order to stay human?

I remember Vittorio at Christmas 2005, when he was imprisoned at Ben Gurion airport, the scars of the handcuffs which had cut off his pulse, the denied contacts to the consulate, the mockery trial. And the Easter of the same year, when he was stopped by the Israeli police at the Jordanian border, directly behind Allenby Bridge, to prevent him from entering Israel, when he was loaded onto a bus and seven of them, one of them a policewoman, beat him “with art”, without leaving external signs, true professionals that they are, they threw him on the ground facedown, and as a last devilry tore out his hair with their potent boots.

Vittorio was persona-non-grata in Israel. Too subversive, one year before he had demonstrated at the Wailing Wall with his friend Gabriele together with the men and women from Budrus village. He taught and sang with them our most beautiful partisan song “O Bella ciao, ciao....”

At that time I did not watch TV, not even when in autumn 2008 an Israeli commando assaulted the fisherboat in Palestinian waters near Rafah and Vittorio was first locked up in Ramle and then sent home in prison clothes and slippers.

Certainly, now I can only thank the press and TV that they have approached us in a decent way, that they have “occupied” our house respectfully, without excesses, and they gave me the possibility to speak about Vittorio and his chosen ideals.

This lost son, now so much alive as he may never have been before, just like the seed that grows and dies in the earth, will bear prosperous fruit. I can see and hear this already in the words of friends, especially the youth, some of them close by and some of them far away who through Vittorio have known and understood how to make sense of “Utopia”, that the

hunger for justice and peace, brotherhood and solidarity still prevails and that, as Vittorio said, "Palestine could as well be in front of your door". We were far away from Vittorio, but we were closer than ever.

As of now, his lively presence which is evergrowing by the hour, is like a wind which from Gaza, his beloved Mediterranean Sea, is blowing wildly and bringing us his hopes and his love for those without a voice, for the weak, the suppressed, bearing us witness.

Restiamo umani.

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