

## **BCSH internship at Diaspora Alliance**

Throughout my academic studies, I explored the topic of Israel/Palestine as a subject of interest, especially following the events of October 7th. In the selection process for the internship, Ken, the director of BCSH, recognized my interest and therefore offered me an internship at Diaspora Alliance (DA).

DA operates transnationally across the US and Europe, with a current strategic focus on the US, Germany, France, the UK, Ireland, and the EU. The organization works on Antisemitism and the political misuse of it, which implies that their work touches on many relevant topics in the current political climate, like the rise of the right wing, the Gaza-Israel war, and the spread of misinformation. I interned with the organization during the Summer of 2025, from June to August. My supervisor and point of contact was Amel Ouaisa, the Europe Managing Director. Amel suggested that I work on my project, which we developed together to fit into the organization's objectives.

Amel and I met several times to talk about the organization, my interests, and the project that could be born from it. Seeing how universities' events unfolded post October 7th, it was clear that I was drawn into having university students and young adults as the main focus of my work. Our similar views on building solidarity in a world of division also stood out in the conversations. At first, we came up with the idea of meeting with young adults from different backgrounds to talk about Israel/Palestine, specifically things that are not usually discussed.

However, when talking with young activists, they expressed their concern speaking up about the topic in the current political climate in Germany and worldwide. Therefore, we decided to change the project to the one I pursued.

## How the organization targets hate

### The organization's beliefs

- **Freedom from fear** - exposing and rendering ineffective the exploration of Jewish fear, both as a means and an end of building alliances to create political power.
  - **Goals:** trusted actor in fighting antisemitism, embedded in solidarity and relationality between antisemitism and other forms of oppression. Contributing to defining and changing what antisemitism is and is not, therefore, shifting the narrative on Jewish threats.
- **Building alliances** - DA is concerned with bringing together diasporic communities (Jewish and non-Jewish) with similar or shared experiences (scapegoated, racialized, or marginalized) to combat oppression and exploitation.
  - **Goals:** Creating resilient networks across Jewish, non-Jewish, and minority communities, enabling them to respond to attacks. Including fighting antisemitism as a goal of broader movements and networks to allow Jews to be welcomed back to the conversation on discrimination.
- **Internationalism as a value and an analytic tool** - using internationalism (political, economic, and cultural cooperation between nations) as a response to identity politics and post-Holocaust memory culture, which right-wing politicians politically misuse.

- **Goals:** developing an organizational understanding of internationalism, its strategic frames (that can be used in other contexts), the impact of international trends on the local landscape (vice versa), appropriate solutions, messages, and projects.

## **Approaches**<sup>1</sup>

The organization's staff is diverse within and outside the Jewish diaspora, strengthening its alliances among various diasporic communities. The organization works in the international sphere with Jews, diasporic, radicalized, targeted, and minority communities and groups, aiming for a world rooted in solidarity rather than division and fear. Their engagement is with Jewish and allies seeking a world of freedom, dignity, and justice for everyone everywhere. The organization seeks effective ways to disrupt and dismantle antisemitism and enhance civil society, human rights, and justice. Their work fields highlight how they think of a solution to the targeted issues. They do that through building progressive networks within and across their focused countries and communities.

### **Work fields**

- **Research & Analysis** - Conducting research and investigative reports and studies supporting the organization's, partners', and allies' goals. As well as organizing international events centered around Jewish history, antisemitism, diaspora politics, and internationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> The information in the sections 'Solutions' and 'Work fields' are taken from [DA's website](#).

- **Training and Pedagogy** - Creating and organizing antisemitism workshops and training to develop an understanding of antisemitism and its manifestation. Writing and publishing analysis, resources, and explainers.
- **Advocacy** - Collaborating with human rights groups, academics, and legal practitioners to combat repression and targeting of progressives, specifically Palestinians and their supporters; typically, offering policies and ways to address antisemitism.

### **Measuring success**

DA sets yearly strategic goals and measures success through its evaluation across its work fields. A vital measure of success is the assistance they provide to individuals or organizations in their ecosystem. Since DA models something they would like to see in the world, they are incubating projects they believe in and supporting them financially and strategically. Most recently, they have supported 'Israelis for Peace' and 'The Diasporist'. They view the project's success as their success. Those projects connect to their goal to develop a robust understanding of antisemitism and how it operates in various political positions. Furthermore, they create accessible resources to a broader audience, like the explainers and antisemitism workshop. Through those, they highlight DA's values of a healthy and inclusive democracy, specifically in this political climate where antisemitic behaviors and actions are more widespread.

### **How the organization views hatred**

As stated before, the organization is focusing on antisemitism as a form of hatred. One of the organization's core objectives is concerned with placing antisemitism as a form of

discrimination among other forms, like islamophobia. Their political analysis highlights the ways in which antisemitism is viewed differently from other forms of discrimination. For example, the instrumentalization of holocaust generational trauma and political philosemitism. DA argues that not viewing antisemitism as interconnected to other forms of discrimination, harms could ultimately contribute to an intensification of antisemitism. Not only that, but it also encourages critical thinking among Jews to recognize who actually cares for them and their needs, especially in the current political climate.

## **The organization's staff officials**

The organization works within a shared framework to ensure alignment among all staff, nationally and internationally. The framework captures the organization's approach to hatred and its assumptions. It was reflected not only through my conversations with staff, but also through their background. Some of the staff are not Jewish and still care to work on antisemitism because of their belief that the struggle for antisemitism is not any different than other forms of discrimination. Similarly, it goes for Jewish staff who are not on board to promote Jewish supremacy but are striving for equality and equity.

The organization makes use of academic research in its work. The academic research they read usually includes: political philosophy, sociology, cultural analysis, political analysis, and psychology. Known academic work that they utilize:

- Producers, Parasites, Patriots, Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity by Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes.
- Culture, community, nation by Stuart Hall

- On top of that, their International Advisory Board includes academics from various countries like Israel, the US, the UK, and Germany.

On top of that, they review media outlets from different political stances to ensure that they are not a self-contained organization. Those organizations and media outlets include New York Times, The Southern Poverty Law Center, On Revolution (substack), Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung, Human Rights Watch, Yesh Din, Policy Working Group, B'Tselem, Amnesty International, Luz Media, Hope Not Hate, Middle East Eye, The Tel Aviv Review Podcast, Jewish Currents, New Voices, History Workshop, Jacobin, National immigration forum, Just Vision, Spiegel, Reuters, WNYC Studios, The Washington Post, PBS News, The Atlantic, The Associated Press, Haaretz, Euro News, BBC, VOA, The Times of Israel, AlJazeera, azcentral, CNN, Forward, The Hill, +972 Magazine, BuzzFeed News, The Brookings Institution, Politico, npr, euro news, CNBC, Deutsche Welle, Vox, LSE, Euroactiv, Le Monde, El País, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, The New Yorker, The Jerusalem Post, Foreign Policy Magazine, United Nations, The Center for Liberal Modernity, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, Einstein Forum, EuropeNow, Jewish Museum Berlin, Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies, The New York Review, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.

# Improvement of DA's work

## Additional scholarship

A clear benefit for DA will be financial resources, since their financial resources are limited.

While they are trying to make the best of what they have, some aspects could be broadened if the organization had more financial resources. For example, focusing on other regions like Latin America and generally expanding their work into the Global South, where large Jewish communities are influenced by similar trends and experience antisemitism, as in Europe and the US. Currently, they do not have the skill sets and resources to do so. Not only that, but they would be able to deepen their effort and approach in the current focus countries as well.

## New Approaches

As mentioned above, DA could benefit from focusing on the Global South, since most of its work is currently done in the US and Western Europe. Nevertheless, I see their intention in it. By that I mean that they aspire to expand, but they do it carefully and strategically. They strongly care about being impactful, influential, and helpful for the communities they work with. Therefore, I cannot see DA choosing to expand without the resources to expand because their work quality matters in this case. Also, they acknowledge that they need local staff members and experts from those countries to work on them truly.

Another point I want to mention is the diversity of the staff members on board. The staff members I had the chance to work with are mostly women or non-binary, and are close in age.

I assume some staff members vary in age and gender. As a young person, it is always incredible to be able to work in those spaces and to learn from those who are older than you, and also to share the young perspectives on issues. DA can follow that line of having younger professionals on board to help them navigate the world of the young generations. Moreover, at the same time, DA will give them professional training and experience. Thus, like any other organization, DA will benefit from having more diversity on the board regarding age, gender, and so on. More specifically, their work field of Training and Pedagogy could be expanded to target teenagers and young adults as their audience, and should be done in ways that appeal to them. For example, 'Israelis for Peace' and 'The Diasporist' can be used to train young leaders and allow them to express their opinions. Especially from the point of view of a young Israeli living in Berlin, I think 'Israelis for Peace' can become an alternative community for the left-wing diaspora, centered around an important cause.

### **Insights from conversations with staff officials**

The organization staff is spread around Europe and the US, and is not necessarily based in certain places, with the aim of turning the European team into a work in Europe-wide contexts. Staff officials in the organization come from different work backgrounds and skills, such as politics, journalism, education, organizing, project management, antisemitism studies, sociology, social work, and civil society. It is done intentionally to bring in individuals with expertise on similar topics from various perspectives. Because of this, disagreements and difficulties often arise, and they approach them with a mutual understanding of political nuances and their shared goal in mind, striving to reach compromises. Their organizational strategy thinks beyond short-term goals, but they think long-term about what is needed to

build now so we can plan better for the future, focusing on local, national, and international aspects. In the long term, they avoid actions that could play into the hands of those opposed to the organization's position. They think of goals in terms of priorities and urgency, without using a quick fix to the problem, together with community organizing. Some political trends they tackle in their work are the tension between antisemitism, anti-zionism, and Israel-related antisemitism, ethno-nationalism, instrumentalization of fear.

The use of language in the organization, especially for outside publication, is done carefully since language is politicized and connotative. For example, the organization avoids terms that are discriminatory and controversial. They specifically reject labels in their work, not to be identified with a specific political agenda, allowing them to work with more organizations. Often, some language is highly influential on people's emotions and can change one's position.

The organization's **research and analysis team** is responsible for research directed towards a wider audience ('outside world') and research meant for partner organizations and activists. Another important part of their work is the organization's internal processes, meaning ensuring the whole organization works persistently and consistently, following the frameworks and assumptions. The data they often use is from alternative, reliable data sources. Through their research and resources, they attempt to determine the threats facing Jews, diasporic, and minority communities. For example, highlighting forms of philosemitism in politics, like using anti-antisemitism rhetoric but partaking in harmful measures against Jews.

In regard to combating hate violence, the organization declares itself to be anti-fascist, anti-war, and anti-violence. They do not view violence as a way to solve hate.

**Their thinking on antisemitism** draws from antisemitism studies; for example, often new manifestations of antisemitism are not predictable and not similar to past ones. When working with partner organizations and public figures, they highlight that antisemitism is usually not a problem until it is an emergency (when one is being blamed for antisemitism). They reject any motivations for combating antisemitism that come from power and not justice, like cheap care and solidarity. Some staff believe that antisemitism does not necessarily need a different word but different conversations.

They are trying to change the current education program on antisemitism that is centered around punishment rather than real influence and understanding of the problem. On top of that, politically, antisemitism is used by the right-wing as a tool to silence free speech and academic freedom. They work with campaign and partner organizations that represent other diasporic communities or minority groups, related and unrelated to antisemitism. Their training also extends to the topic of antisemitism and islamophobia, highlighting the interconnection between those forms of racism and the goal of collective liberation and solidarity. Thus, it is relevant to all individuals.

## About // In search for solidarity

"In Search for Solidarity" is an interview-based research project that explores how members of the Israeli-Palestinian diaspora and their allies within the various movements can find common ground and build solidarity around the topic of Israel/Palestine. The interviews of young adults would eventually lead to the publication of an article exploring the project's themes.

The project aims to foster thoughtful, values-driven dialogue by publishing a series of articles based on interviews that reflect a range of perspectives. Rather than focusing on divisions, the articles will seek to highlight meaningful connections between individuals with different views, encouraging mutual understanding and reflection.

The focus is on young adults and university students, and the core outcome of the project will be the written articles. Given the sensitivity of the topic—especially within the German context—all interview contributions will be treated with the utmost care. **By request**, one's name will not be published, and his participant will remain anonymous. We are aiming to publish the articles. Therefore, in that case, participants will be informed ahead of time and offered a chance to say no and/or review how their input has been represented.

## Guidelines

- The research topic: **the difficulty of reaching solidarity among those who care for Israel/Palestine and hold different perspectives, but share a consensus of human rights values.**
- Engage with people who do not identify/are identified on the ends of the spectrum:  
(Pro-Israel+Zionist)  (neutral)  (Pro-Palestine+anti-Israel)

## Values

- **Curiosity** - approach each other's opinions with curiosity and not with prejudices. (non-judgement).
- **Non-violence** - How we might approach non-violence towards each other as allies, (verbal violence, socio-economic violence, not limited).
- **Respect** - the outward expression of acknowledging and honoring someone's dignity. It's the action that mirrors the understanding of another person's inherent value. When

we respect someone, we honor their boundaries, opinions, and autonomy. That nod of acknowledgment says, "I see you, and I appreciate your worth."<sup>2</sup>

- **Interdependence** - Interdependence refers to a situation where two or more actors (states, organizations, or individuals) mutually rely on each other, and changes in one actor's situation can affect the others. (premise: actions in the region impact all sides involved).<sup>3</sup>
- **Freedom of speech** - Freedom of speech is the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, by any means.<sup>4</sup>
- **Justice/fairness** - what does justice mean for each individual.

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<sup>2</sup> ["Dignity vs. Respect: Are They Two Sides of the Same Coin?"](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Interdependence in International Organization and Global Governance](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Freedom of speech](#)

# Interview questions

## 1) Identity / Political momentum

- Who are you? Tell me about yourself (Background and identification)
- What made you interested in participating in this interview?
  - urgent/topic/curiosity/else

## 2) relation to the topic of Israel/Palestine

- How do you understand the current political moment we're living through?
  - How does the person understand the discussion about Israel/Palestine and antisemitism?
  - The context related to Israel/Palestine (right-wing, antisemitism, and misuse of it)
- The intersection between the discussion about Israel/Palestine, antisemitism, and its challenges and opportunities
  - (what makes it harder to hold those conversations).
  - What are the principles and practices in trying to have those discussions?
- How did you learn about Israel/Palestine and antisemitism? (background)
  - Do you think there is more for you to learn on the topic?
  - Do you feel like you are discouraged or encouraged to learn about one over the other, and by whom?

## 3) Solidarity in practice

- What does solidarity mean to you?
  - What are the values that are underlying it?
  - What would you be willing to do in the name of solidarity or already done?  
(Actions: BDS)
- Can you think of any examples of solidarity (not necessarily I/P related) that you consider meaningful or successful?
  - What allowed that?

#### **4) The experience of collectivity – from the personal to the political**

- Do you see yourself as a part of a collective, and if so, what makes it a "we" and why?
  - If not, what would you need, or what do collectives need in general?
  - Like an agreed-upon set of values-driven goals, institutional support, recognition, or else
- What could a “we” made up of you and your peer look like?
  - As minimal as it can be.
- What can we provide each other to ensure a safe space? What would you need?
- What values would “others” need to embody in order to become part of your “we”?
  - How far can you go with this in the request of others? (what is your red line)

#### **5) Justice (the goals of the movement)**

- How does justice look to you in this political sphere of Israel/Palestine?
- How can peace advocates come together to fight for a just peace in Israel/Palestine?
  - What has been making it difficult?
- What actions are being taken to reach that (short and long term)?
- Could we, with solidarity, reach a collective justice?
  - Do you (peace advocates) have shared goals? Visions?
- What are the disadvantages of collective justice?
  - Is it ‘worth’ doing despite the disadvantages?

# In search for solidarity

## Opening piece

August 2025, Berlin

When I tell someone that I am Israeli, it is a confession that is easily hidden behind my unidentifiable appearance and my native-like English accent. I say it, quietly, my identity, which has been a source of discomfort ever since. But not before. I glance around, trying to sense if anybody has heard. I look back at the person I am conversing with, wondering what they might think. Not just wondering, but speculating. The range of emotional reactions can vary from surprise to anger to curiosity. These days, I rarely come across neutrality, or 'Israel? Never heard of it.'

Before, I used to speak proudly about my country and joke about Judaism. Embracing the spirit I grew up on. I did not associate my country with criticism as much, internally and externally. It is beyond imagination that a feeling of ease with it was once found within me. One goes through countless identity crises in the span of one's life, some less urgent than others, but this identity crisis is one of constant confrontation, a collective one. And one that I am the least significant part of.

"If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought." George Orwell

Before the current war, I did not discuss Israel/Palestine with anyone who had no relation to the region. At the age of 18, when I met other like-minded young adults abroad, we exchanged our thoughts on arts, culture, and life, but not on politics. For different reasons, such as not being aware of it, feeling uncomfortable discussing it, or lacking the urgency to have a political conversation. It goes both ways; sharing our opinions, views, and ideas was not a priority. Back then, I had yet to experience the regard of the unknowing eyes on my country.

Since October 7, that has changed.

Within weeks, unfolding events, politics, and media pressured and pushed all to hold an opinion on my country, the war, and the region's history, whether they were well-informed about it or just heard it through some media outlet. It escalated and became a worldwide affair, especially a topic of interest for young adults around the globe.

Rather quickly, people spoke in compassion for one group and not the other. It is us or them, a common misinterpretation. So one might assume I would have been less surprised and more tolerant of it. Yet, I was still frustrated. It is not the conversations that were happening in Israel/Palestine; hard feelings have been there for decades. I am referring to those who have only recently joined the conversation. The 'outsider' narrative one chose was based on which nation one supported: Israel or Palestine. People were called to judge which historically oppressed nations they should be righteous about. The ideas of antisemitism, colonialism, and injustice fueled one's opinion into making a choice of whom he should support. Politicians and media outlets praise it, use it to their advantage, repeatedly highlighting that the two narratives, the two nations, could never sit together; therefore, you should choose, now!

The use of pro-something and anti-something halts the exploration of complexities, overlooking an accurate and fair portrayal of opinion. Judith Levine <sup>5</sup> explains her rejection of those terms, pointing out that those terms blur the distinction between governments and people. The threat: our focus is drifting from humanism to merely political ideology. One can easily fall into the trap of keeping the people accountable for a governmental action, solely seeing people as their country and government representatives. Not only that, but it strengthens the idea that there will forever be hate and resentment between Israelis and Palestinians, that we will never be able to see eye to eye. The just call for liberation of the Palestinians should not go hand in hand with endorsing nationalism that can escalate to promoting one's ethnonationalism. The article's comparison of the discussion to the Vietnam War of Aya Gruber sheds light on a possible resolution: rejecting the nationalist essence of those definitions and highlighting fundamental values like pacifism and human rights, connecting them to humanist values. Granting one the opportunity to explore their view and express it nuancedly, underlying complexity as a part of human society, and acknowledging the long, complex history of the region. Even though the

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<sup>5</sup> [Why we need to stop using 'pro-Palestine' and 'pro-Israel', Judith Levine for 'The Guardian'](#).

terms Pro-peace and Anti-war are also binary, they enable gathering individuals for a shared goal and not for a narrative. A few words cannot encapsulate an opinion, but some can do it better than others.

The headlines of the 'Middle East Crisis' have not only been concerned about reporting the region's daily news, but also international reactions. At the beginning, universities stood out as a space where the topic had a daily, living presence, [a political battlefield](#) driven by righteous and dogmatic voices. The university groups that were established in support of a nation were tagged under the bigger movement of pro-Palestine or pro-Israel. However, movements are not homogeneous in their opinions or manifestations. There is no one way of being in solidarity with people. Vigil and memorial events can be held in solidarity, but also terror attacks. Views on vision, values, and actions differ. The lack of a shared position turned the movements into a subject of politicalization. The media and politicians claimed it to be whatever fits into their story.

That year, I started university abroad in the US. I was immediately viewed as pro-Israel. Horrified by 'October 7', like many Israelis, I felt the urgency to talk about it with my peers. To not let it disappear within other headlines. Innocent citizens were murdered, families left scarred, and people were taken hostage; **48 still are.**

Already in the first months of the war, Israel was accused of war crimes; some organizations even claimed genocide. At that time, it was nearly impossible for me to confront those accusations. Yet, I could point out to our corrupt government and the current hostages, without seeing the interconnectivity of it all. I was not as aware of politics and the history of Israel/Palestine. Indeed, something smelled fishy; however, it still did not fully click.

Conversations with my university friends occasionally referred to the war, but we refrained from opening it up. Assumingly, because we knew how it had unfolded among other university students, even at our university. When I talked about it with those who believed differently, I often felt like they were not explaining their view in a compelling and empathetic way, but rather trying to prove me wrong.

One specific instance that stuck with me. A good friend of mine back then, defined herself as pro-Palestine. It did not bother us to be friends, which I really appreciate because it was rare to find. We did not talk about it or agree to disagree; we knowingly neglected it and focused on topics of 20-something. But the curiosity to open up and talk about it was present. At least, I felt it. I remember once we were casually chatting in the common area with other students, and the topic came up. My memory of the conversation is vague, but I vividly remember being questioned if I was ok with this action or that action. What do I think of the war, of Palestinians, of the conflict? Do I think the war is justified or not? Do I justify the killing of Palestinians? All those significant, relevant, and complex questions were on my plate for me to answer in a split second. I held my tears in place. I felt like I was being attacked. They did not use an aggressive tone, yell at me, or anything like it. I do not think they want me to feel this way. But I did. Something in their action disrespected me, was not accepting, or empathetic. They so-called demanded that I express empathy, while not being fully empathetic. I was being tested on my humanity. I was forced to agree with their opinions and condemn my country's actions for their ease rather than mine. Not a discussion but a pressure for an agreement. The conversation ended. We all noticed its escalation, becoming one of a different dimension we did not support. I do not think I was the one to stop it. I think it was my friend. In hindsight, I should be content that those individuals are the ones who surrounded me during times of mad global crisis. I am not mad. I am not bearing a grudge. Yet, I wonder, why can we not thoroughly cast off this nature?

My friend and I talked afterwards. We agreed that for the sake of our friendship, we would never discuss Israel/Palestine again. I agreed. I care for our friendship. But it did not sit right with me; I felt the tension of unspoken different worldviews. Not one of a family member you choose to ignore when occasionally meeting them because of your kinship. But of an intentional choice. You choose to be friends, even good friends, with someone you know, there is an important topic that you cannot talk about, and it surrounds you all the time. Differently, but both have the same outcome: conversations not occurring.

Meanwhile, some of my other peers held antizionist, anti-Israeli opinions. This manifested in their behavior towards me and my Israeli classmates. They were hostile to us, unwilling to talk

with us, or make eye contact. They could not recognize the possibility that we have different opinions from the mainstream Israeli perception. The only times they would speak with us were during class when the circumstances forced them to. The subtle line between antizionism and antisemitism was run over, time and time again. Regardless of me, my personhood, my opinions. I was and still am a subject of antisemitism.

It is not to differentiate me from others. Not to say that because what I believe in, I should not be subject to hate, and others should be. The unfortunate experience is that even when having open-mindedness and good intentions, some will not cease to discriminate against you, just because of your identity, which I guess weighs more than opinions.

I am still in an ongoing process of discovering my opinion, of drowning in the ideas, claims, and opinions. I cannot tell you where exactly I stand. But I did find my peace with it. Frankly, I am not the person to spit out historical facts or to argue with one who disagrees. However, I choose not to be a one.

Looking inside, I was able to question what is actually important to me and what I value. Do I value human rights? Yes. Do I value non-violence? Yes. Empathy? Yes. Respect? Yes. Equality? Yes. I seek complexity, knowledge, and empathy for everyone, aiming for a shared future.

Finding the concept or narrative you relate to more might be easier. But before, you should pause to think about its profound meaning and influence. Israel/Palestine is not a sports game where you cheer one team and booze to the other; it involves people's lives. Instead, stand up for your beliefs, ideas, and thoughts, not just for two words.

If you were to ask me, are you pro-Israel or pro-Palestine? I will answer. I am pro-peace. And I am not the only one to say that. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Inspired by [Two bereaved mothers who know price of war work for peace, Samantha Laine Perfas for 'The Harvard Gazette'](#).

# Interview piece

During July and August 2025, I interviewed Israelis, Jews, and Germans (those were the people I got on board). This is the piece that came out.

## **Some disclaimers before reading this.**

Be aware that you might find the content of those interviews triggering as people mention experiences of war, police violence, personal trauma, and generally the struggles of Israel/Palestine. There I say, **trigger warning**. The interviews are more about personal experiences and their emotional effects. So it does contain sensitive information, but it is not the main content like in other works on the topic.

I chose to interview people who are interested in and have to do something with the topic, but are not by any means experts on it. I wanted to give them a voice. One might be critical of the factuality of the statements made by the participants. While I do not support spreading misinformation and factualizing false information, it is not the point in the interviews.

I ask you, as readers, to see beyond the person's identity and surface-level opinions that one might tag them with. Notions of humanity should lead your judgments. Otherwise, it would seem pointless. I agree on the importance of context and one's upbringing, use that to help you understand why the interviewees think the way they do.

Those interviews are transcribed and edited by me, but they do not present me and my personal opinions. Those are the opinions of the interviewees. I carefully edited the transcription so it would be as accurate and clear as possible to the interviewees' answers.

## **How to read it?**

Each of the interviewees is kept anonymous. However, I did include some background information about each interviewee. I gave each interviewee a color.<sup>7</sup> The color will indicate which statement belongs to which interviewee, so one might better understand their view.

I asked the interviewees to answer the questions according to their interpretation of the current movement, regardless of their knowledge. So many interviewees used the terms 'I think' or 'I feel'. When writing their answers, I did not always write that out because of its repetition. So, keep that in mind when reading it.

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<sup>7</sup> Usually, colors are associated with meanings, but not in this case. Colors are used as a tool to differentiate between the participants and to make it easier to read.

You might notice a few things while reading this. One is that some questions were unanswered by one interviewee, or even more. At times, that is because while answering a question, the interviewee had answered another question in one way or another. Otherwise, it was a time constraint, considering that the interview is lengthy.

Another is that the length of an answer differs. When interviewing, I noticed that interviewees gravitate towards topics they have a lot to share and say about. I did not want to limit and stop them; naturally, I let them continue speaking until they finished. Even if it was long, it goes the other way around. I tried to push them if they did not have much to say. However, most of the time, it did not lead to much more.

## interviewees' background:

**Red:** she/her, Jewish Israeli, lived in Israel her whole life, served in the army for two years working in media, currently a theatre student in a leading Israeli institute.

**Green:** they/them, born in West Jerusalem (Jewish Israeli) and having moved to Germany at an early age, has been actively involved in political activism for 8 years, including 'No Borders movement, anti-militarism, and climate justice.

**Blue:** she/her, 18 years old New York Jew, sophomore psychology student in a politically active university (currently is not involved in any movement), educated within the Jewish system in NYC (day school, public school, Jewish summer camp), her mom made an aliyah <sup>8</sup> and lived in Israel for seven years, that is where she met her dad, has family in Israel (Jerusalem and across Israel), she and her immediate family live in NYC.

**Purple:** they/them, 27 years old, American Jew, born and raised in Massachusetts, lived in NYC for seven years attending college and graduate school, studying Jewish gender and Women's studies and doing Jewish service year in NYC during quarantine, queer, gender expansive, genderqueer, farmer, Jewish outdoor educator, practicing and observant Jew, Shomer Shabbat (observing the Sabbath), Ashkenazi Jew (Eastern Europe and Austria-Hungry area), grandmother escaped to Holocaust with her family to Italy and then moved to the US.

**Burgundy:** she/they, a student in Berlin, mixed background, organized in diaspora communities in Berlin and cultural activism.

**Orange:** they/them, master's student in art school in Berlin, working while studying.

**Grey:** they/them, born and raised New Yorker, multi-ethnic Jewish family background, Mother of Yemeni descent and father of Belarusian descent, complex family background (ugly divorce, families have escaped persecution), influencing their narrative of who they became, like shame around their queer identity (even when not being out), genderqueer, Zillennial, mixed media artist.

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<sup>8</sup> Aliyah is the Hebrew term (popular in the Jewish world) for the immigration of non-Israeli Jews to Israel.

## What made you interested in participating in this interview?

I am curious about this topic and have something to say about it. In Europe, this topic has been talked about a lot. I am interested in broadening my horizons outside of Israel and want to pause and dedicate some thought to it. Nonetheless, there is a line between my curiosity and hearing criticism that I do not want to confront, and could make me feel we are the bad ones in this story. I want to stand for my country; otherwise, what is the point of living here? I want to feel like I like what is going on here. It will never be 100% what I want. I also want to feel like my country is constantly improving and it takes care of me, not trying to screw me up.

I am interested in having a proper discussion on this topic, rather than just holding those conversations in hallways, after protests, or in other informal contexts. To do something similar to this project and reflect on those conversations occurring between the diaspora community, for example.

To be entirely candid, it kind of feels like I am going crazy. I see the ways people that I have gone to school with for years, who I know and who, in all other facets, I trust and believe really strongly in their politics, respond to the conflict. I see how many adults in my life are responding; they are so intent on maintaining and preserving their narrative. As a Jewish person, I do not like what is being done in my name. A lot of what I see happening is people saying, "Well, this needs to happen so that we can prevent another Shoah," or "This is just what needs to happen because it is the homeland," and similar statements. I have had to have so many conversations about what Judaism actually is and what Zionism is, and do so much educating for so many people, and it is exhausting.

I am always looking for opportunities to talk about Israel-Palestine, as a Jewish person, as an American whose tax dollars are interwoven with the state of Israel. I would say also as a Jewish person raised in American liberal Judaism, aka Zionism. Who grew up, became radicalized towards the end of college, and now, as an anti-Zionist, organizes for Palestinian liberation. On top of that, I have decided to make my career, other than my farming, my career as someone who works in Jewish religious and communal life. This means that I have decided and committed to being in a community with people who have different views from mine. I do not think it is okay to have to hide my views in the same way, where I think it is acceptable for people to have opinions about Israel that are different from mine and be able to talk about them. I want that same grace. I want to be in community with people who are different and, dare I say, Zionists. Because I think as soon as I shut myself off from people with different views, I become part of the problem. So as long as other people are respectful and willing to be in community with me, I feel the same way about them. So, the idea of this project and solidarity, as well as being in a community with other people, feels really important to me.

I started my master's program in October 2023, approximately one to two weeks after October 7th. Mainly throughout the first year of my studies, we have been organizing. Even though I have been going to Palestine-related demos in Berlin and Leipzig before October 2023, and reading about Palestine, learning from Palestinian friends, and being organized around other struggles. I have not been very organized on the topic of Palestine in Berlin before October.

I have not been so active in our collective for one or two semesters now. This semester, I was not in the collective, and the semester before, we were in a phase of re-structuring and dealing with burnout, a very common experience. We were also dealing with frustration and repression, and not knowing what we were doing in the university, where people graduate and new ones join. The movement has undergone a transformation.

So when my comrade sent me this interview, I viewed it as an opportunity to reflect on it a bit and exchange with a person who is not directly part of it, but is researching it. I would like to reflect on it a bit together and have the space to think about where I am and where we have been. Also, look at the achievements and failures together.

After October 7th, many things happened at the university, and it was a snowball effect. We had a protest, and we were part of a loose constellation of students, some teachers, and employees, which escalated into a media defamation incident. So through this, the student collective was born as a response. I was part of it until the beginning of this year, and had different involvements. Our protest performance was a response to the administration and president publishing the Israeli flag on the university's website, which has already received much criticism from students and teachers. Then, we were falsely accused of holding an antisemitic protest while we just wanted to shed light on the 40K Palestinians already dead then. After the protest, the president gave a newspaper interview in which he falsely accused a teacher of orchestrating this protest. His contract was not prolonged. We attempted to communicate with the administration, but they refused to engage with us properly. For the following semesters, we had been organizing weekly strikes to be in solidarity with the people of Gaza and Palestinians; to pay more attention to the genocide. Another incident occurred when a student attempted to print out humanitarian facts and was subsequently banned from the room. He was accused of being physically violent, which was a false accusation as well. It was also never made public why the other teacher got dismissed, and his contract was not renewed. Even though there were many testimonies that he improved his postgraduate program since he started, it was promised that it would be a two-year program, not just one year. It was quite a shock for us all.

There was an open letter that many teachers and employees signed. It was not calling the war in Gaza a genocide, but rather Israel's self-defense. Not even mentioning a word about Palestinians. It was a truly hurtful letter and caused much distress to many people. Then we

found out that the president had called us a group with extremist tendencies and wanted to bring in the police. The president was highly involved in getting the ex-matriculation law passed, which means that students can be dismissed from university for their political activism through an administrative court (Ordnungsgericht) set up by the university, with no other authority to check on the university. Therefore, the university itself would decide whether to dismiss the student or not, which is obviously incorrect in many ways.

There were student ID controls, which were followed by racial bias from the security because they organized a pro-Israeli event. The people are getting discriminated against, and there is no investment in the actual fight against antisemitism or any discrimination. The president has never shown himself to be really cooperative with that. Just did the very minimum.

I was specifically interested in participating in the interview because of the qualitative and quantitative research, the evolution of the movement, and how solidarity with Gaza is being silenced. The interview frequently addresses these points. It is quite an important work to do, recording all of these instances. I have experienced in the past two years repression and violence in Germany. I was aware of it, but it just crushed all my fantasies about it, and it feels very surreal. The amount of violence that anyone who is so-called pro-Palestinian is facing.

I do mixed media. I tried studying media studies, but the American media world is very nepotistic, and it does not matter how passionate or talented you are. It is about who you know that gets you in the door. I had to build all those connections that I did not have. I face a lot of glass ceilings in New York. That is something that I have wrestled with a lot lately, and I have internalized my identity because I am a very productive person. But a lot of companies do not give me a chance because of the biases they project towards me. I often wonder where else I could go? Would it be better if I went to Tel Aviv or if I went to London? I am afraid that it will only get harder because I am moving to somewhere where I do not know people as much.

I feel crippled by societal circumstances like Trumpism that is happening every day. I get triggered by my identity from what happens in Israel/Palestine daily. Just even seeing people fighting online or in the streets. It just puts it in my periphery, and to think that everyone is going to war. That scares me and makes me, as a soft femme, feel very triggered because I still have a part of me that is like this innocent child thinks that I am just gonna be me and life should be happy and good. And then you are thrown into a world that is tough, rough, transphobic, and so many other things, like ableist. So you wrestle within yourself. Do I hate myself to be told that I am accepted, like change, and hate myself? Or do I struggle to love myself, knowing I will be rejected? I choose the latter because that is the only thing that gives you peace of mind, but it is still very hard to obtain.

I feel we all have something to share about this regional conflict. There is an intersection of my identity in it. I am someone who is Mizrahi American. I am someone with dual citizenship and lived many years in Israel, and a long time ago lived a very closeted Orthodox life. I have a lot of family in Israel/Palestine, so I know it directly. I was there through various wars, hidden bomb shelters, and experienced family grief and loss.

It is a widely spoken topic, but the average person has never visited the area. They are commenting on the area as if they are an expert. And it really enrages me because here I am. Everyone is talking about this region I am from, but no one gives me a platform to speak. In America, the white intellectual Ashkenazi class speaks for the wider world as the side that is taking the pro-Israel side. Regardless of whether you are pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian, they profit off of it and make businesses to make advocacy groups, whether it is on the left, like T'ruah, or on the right, like AIPAC. They are not interested in giving everyday Palestinians and Israelis who are at the intersections a voice. That is something that I have observed. There are just more layers to the societal division that require the rehumanization of people like me in order for people to understand how to aim towards an equitable society truly.

## Relation to the topic of Israel/Palestine

### How do you understand the current political moment we're living through?

**Specific topics: Israel/Palestine, antisemitism, and international political trends.**

We are in the midst of a big issue right now. People are really in despair. Netanyahu is making trouble and neglecting the will of the people. It could be that it is so-called smarter, and there would not be any other possibility for it. I feel like I do not know anything. I am tired of it; they have been confusing me for the longest time. I agree with the saying of conquering and giving up to bring back the hostages. They are both striving for peace and goodness. Everyone wants peace; I want peace.

I am overwhelmed by so much news; there are so many disasters, almost every day. I started to develop a rejection of politics, although before I was really interested in understanding politics. Knowing what is going on is an integral part of being a citizen. But they keep exhausting us with disasters and deaths. You want to go through the day, you are no longer interested in reading something related to your country, and you know it is a mistake to do that. Maybe if I had read more, I would have expressed my opinion, protested, and done something. I want to bring back the hostages. That must be a consensus in Israel.

I did lose interest because I felt like every minute I would get more involved with politics, I would not want to live here, and I would be less happy. Just thinking about the economic side of Israel makes me question how I am going to live here in the future.

This period is characterized by multi-world crises, like climate change, the social crisis following the rise of fascism, and undoubtedly the genocide Israel is committing in Gaza. The genocide is mainly affecting Gazans and their families, without a doubt, but also Israelis, within Israel and in the diaspora. There is a sense of urgency, a push to act first. There is not always time to converse, but this is generally the case in political struggles and activism. It also appears to be a general characteristic of contemporary politics that everything feels urgent.

It is polarized. It is difficult everywhere. I mean, there is a lot to be said about what is happening across the world. In Israel, I guess the brief version is in response to how Palestinians have been treated and a host of relational, national, and other problems, discussions, and forms of treatment, Hamas attacked on October 7th, 2023. Since then, there has been an escalating conflict with various goals depending on who you ask, whether that is the return of the hostages and/or destruction of warfare, the level of annihilation, and starvation, which really depends on who you talk to.

I think so many things. I would say one thing is that this has always been coming. This has always been on the way. I am sure 75 plus years ago, it was not like they sat down at a table and were like, This is what is going to happen. But I do think it is part of the greater plan for gaining power. I think the US is involved significantly in all of that because it is convenient for the US to have a stakeholder in the Middle East for financial and economic reasons. But also, it is convenient for the US to say that they are on the side of the Jews in a lot of ways.

The current political moment is interesting to me in a lot of ways. One of the things I have been reflecting on more recently is that now that we are almost two years after October 7th, the number of people who have actually shifted in their views, who are willing to say now what is happening is bad. Whereas two years ago after October 7th, they had their guard was up so much because anytime there is threat to Jews, that ancestral trauma really kicks in. You go back to what you know, which is the thing that was sold to us over and over and over again, which is if Israel exists, Jews are safe; which has never been true. There is no evidence that it has been true. But it is what we are told, what I was told. And I think we are hopefully learning that it is not true.

The misconception about what is going on is that people are always saying it is really complicated. I think that language was used when I was growing up, too. I mean, in a Jewish Hebrew school synagogue setting, I never heard the word Palestine. I did not know what Palestine was until I went to college. It was not a conversation. But when we did talk about how Israel became a modern state, there was always that it is really complicated to avoid the question. I think people still use that phrase now to do the both sides thing, rather than knowing that the actual safety of one group allows for the safety of multiple groups. But instead, it is every group for itself.

People will be like, well, it is complicated because the Jews needed a homeland after the Holocaust. It was an obvious choice of land because of the biblical connection to that place. Then also, that is important to them. But yes, the Palestinians were there, so it is important to them too. Also, biblically, it is an important place to them. Claims like they started it or retaliated in a way worse than what happened. So playing that both sides are at fault in a situation when my understanding of the larger situation is that there has been a stronger agitator the entire time in the state of Israel. It is complicated, it is actually just a way to deflect from how we got to where we are. It is like, well, Israel only did this because Hamas did this, or because the Palestinians did this, or Israel did this because the Palestinians would not do this peacefully, when the thing they are saying that they would not do peacefully is to be uprooted from the place where they lived. 'It is complicated' or 'both sides' is used to take responsibility away from the people who oppressing others. Then, also, the conflation of Palestinians with their government is really crazy. I think it happened when the whole thing about like the tunnels or Hamas did this terrible thing, which we can all agree that something bad happened, and it

would be great if no one ever died. Also, if you are oppressing people, restricting their access to a place, and you give them no way to seek personhood in a state, you give them no option.

There are just all these crazy things that end up putting the blame on people who have no other choice but to survive. As terrible as October 7th was, and as wrong as it is to lose innocent lives, the alternative was just a slow death for Palestinians. Now it is awful, and they are experiencing a genocide. But in a way, people are talking about it. The things that have been happening for the past 75 years are now more well-known in the public view. It is bad that it had to happen this way. That is where it gets complicated. What if it never happened? What if things just stayed as they were, and there was a slow killing and death to an entire culture? Now the alternative is a quick, brutal death.

To be honest, there have been phases where I felt that some kind of changes were happening, but looking at the big picture, I do not feel that there has been any significant change in Germany at all. I think the narrative shifts slightly, but then, how the state reacts and responds with laws, and how we see it in the university. For example, the annual exhibition has just taken place, and there were similar solidarity actions to those of last year. However, in comparison, the university administration's response has worsened in terms of repression and laws. The same goes for the political climate, like right-wing rising and migration laws; it feels that the situation in Gaza has been used to accelerate authoritarianism in Germany, and I can feel that very much. When it comes to Gaza, the situation gets worse and worse. I do not see any change for the good. It is my personal experience, perhaps because I am not as active anymore, but it also feels like a broader experience. It has been almost two years since people have been engaging in full-time activism, so I feel that the student movement is experiencing a slight comeback and restructuring. The momentum is different, and so is the capacity of people.

I look at it intersectionally, as in we live in a highly capitalized world that is based on post-colonial exploitation. For me, Israel is a settler colonial and a terrorist state, backed by the US, Germany, and other Western countries, and supported with weapons. It just shows the general white supremacist oppressive technocracy that is happening.

Just shows the image fabrication of Muslim people. We are currently in a very aggressive period. Where no one, especially in Germany, is really ashamed anymore to vocalize racist and discriminatory slurs. Anti-Muslim racism was always there, but it has been more vocal, and the number of crimes has definitely gone up a lot. It is scary what is happening right now.

It is hard to describe because it is very vitriolic and hypotensive. There are a lot of red buttons that will make people culturally explode. Compared to when I was a child in New York, for example, where there was more positivity and support for Israel. Now it has radically shifted to

the Palestinian side. That also deals with the migration of folks from a lot of Muslim countries who are supporters of Palestine and came to New York, and a radical shift of left-wing politics and all that. But the point is, I do not really identify as an Israeli. My mother was born in that country, but I feel terrified to speak openly about anything related to that, as an identity that I hide because of the fear of being targeted. Or just even bringing it up, people will politicize it and will be like, so what do you think about the conflict? Why is that the first question you want to ask a random person. I am tired and I do not want that pain.

- **Israel/Palestine and antisemitism**

The discussion of Israel/Palestine gives a way for a lot of antisemitism to get a mainstream legitimization, attention, inclusion, and understanding. Presented as heroic, valid, and acceptable, but truly, it underlies a lot of hate.

Trump is very influential; sometimes it seems like he decides on Israel more than the government itself. Surely, also, social media, specifically TikTok. If social media did not exist, people would probably be careless, and there would be fewer protests, because it is trendy. On top of that, people and countries around the world feel comfortable intervening in anything related to Israel. Since Israel's establishment, we needed an agreement, and the whole world was involved in it. Subsequently, when significant events occur in Israel, nations feel like they can control us in some ways because we are the only Western country in the Middle East. We have much influence, and every country uses it as its means.

In Germany, it is a multi-dimensional complex question. There is a rise in antisemitism, but it is mischaracterized a lot of the time. There is a definite rise in fear and insecurity among my Jewish friends and acquaintances. In the German discourse, it seems that this word has been overused to the point where it has lost its meaning. It is upsetting that it is hard to talk about real manifestations of antisemitism because of that. I specifically barely talk about it because of that. But when it comes out in the conversation, I try to first talk with people about what antisemitism means to them, because clarifying what we both mean by this term is often necessary for fostering a meaningful discussion about it.

In Germany, there is an interesting phenomenon that even the right cares about the topic of Israel/Palestine. An article I read discussed the growing popularity of pro-Palestinian positions within the right-wing political spectrum. It pointed out to me that this topic has been (mis-)used in various positions on the political spectrum for different political agendas. It is visible, especially in German politics, for instance, that everyone must be pro-Israeli. However, I do not think it truly necessarily reflects individuals' opinions. This is not exclusive to pro-Israeli countries. The topic can also be used for political Agendas in pro-Palestinian countries.

That is a difficult question. I mean, obviously, the history and connection between Israelis and Palestinians goes back far before the 1940s. However, at this point, there is definitely a strong power dynamic, as one is a leader with democratic connections all over the world that undoubtedly influences. To be entirely candid, I have experienced more antisemitism in relation to Israel than in relation to anything else. I think it does not necessarily, as of right now, make me feel safer to know the way that the Jewish state is acting because it feels like it is acting while representing all of us.

There is so much discourse about the definition of antisemitism and what that looks like. I definitely see a culture, particularly in the US, of Jews being used as this example and being prioritized at a time where there is also rampant islamophobia, racism, homophobia, and a lot of other important topics, and the Jews keep getting singled out. It is very tricky as a school (refer to her university) that got its funding returned by Trump. Much of what they wrote focuses on how they protect Jewish students. There is no mention of any other kind of students because the concern is about the Jews.

We see them discussing how they will maintain their strong day school connections and allocate more resources to developing Hillel. Hillel is already a larger organization than any other religious organization on campus. Thankfully, there is currently a commitment to protecting against antisemitism, but it definitely sows discomfort on campus. It prioritizes Jews at the expense of others. It is uncomfortable.

Antisemitism has been the major excuse to repress the Palestine Solidarity student movements, which is also not new. We have seen this before October 7th. What is very interesting and striking is that in my university, the anti-Deutsch (anti-German) Zionist activists, who defamed us, were not Jewish; they are all Christians and white. They have been mobilizing a lot against us with the German press and the administration, using the narrative of antisemitism.

Going back to the student movement, a statement was made by the professors and administration that somewhat condemned our actions. Afterwards, an antisemitism office was established, and it ran on a probationary period under an alumna who had no professional academic experience whatsoever in anti-discrimination, antisemitism, and anti-racism work. After she was hired, her first action in the annual exhibition was to take pictures of all the people wearing Keffiyehs or artworks that had a sticker stating, 'This artist stands with students in Gaza, all universities in Gaza have been partially or fully destroyed.' She went around taking pictures of every single art piece that had these stickers, reporting them back, and creating a database. Apparently, this is what we assume or are aware of. In the end, she was not hired fully. It was a transitional position because there was also no public announcement, which the university is obligated to make. Then they hired another person with

a Zionist stance, of course, but who has academic and professional experience in the field of antisemitism. Later, they hired the Mideast Freedom Forum for a lot of money to teach on antisemitism, whose stance is also very Zionist and racist.

At my university, there is a Jewish Solidarity Collective, and they have been very active in arguing against the Mideast Freedom Forum, and have been in touch with the antisemitism officer, but they have never really been considered Jewish or Jewish enough. Like many times, their Jewishness was questioned because they wanted to be anonymous. Instead, non-Jewish Germans were considered more legitimate speakers about the topic.

In terms of antisemitism, there are a lot of white, privileged Jews who are living in secure homes in America. I cannot speak for the rest of the world. They believe in their minds that any criticism of Israel is antisemitic, and that is just not true. I had a white lesbian message me on Shabbat two weekends ago, disparaging me for over an hour because she did not like my politics of standing up for Palestinian rights. I told her politely, if standing up for human rights triggers you, I do not want to be your friend. You can unfollow me. That is fine. She was like, I am going to unfollow you. And I am like, okay, what am I, like five? So, they are trying to hate me and bring me down. But I noticed this trope that happens both in the Muslim community and in the Jewish community. That is when you have an opinion that is away from the mainstream; they try to demonize you and culturally excommunicate you, which is really painful because we have our own relationships and ties with our heritage that are not based on someone's manufactured political ideology.

There is obviously so much to be said, but at the same time, it is complicated. There are people on the right who say that antisemitism and anti-Zionism are the same. And then there are people on the left who say they are not. I do feel, though, in the middle, that there is overlapping. What I mean by overlapping is that I have experienced directly how anti-Zionism has led to antisemitism. Whether it is vandalizing lockers of Jewish people and cyberbullying Jewish students at my college. Or blaming a random Jew who lives in Minnesota for the war thousands of miles away, which is still fucking ridiculous that the average person could have that mentality and be like, you are the fault for what Netanyahu is doing. Whether you are Jewish and you do not even have Israeli citizenship, that is another thing. People cannot even distinguish between Israeli and Jewish, and then the Israeli left and the Israeli right. Everyone has just been brandished under one bad evil thing. But I also feel that the Palestinian side is also being seen as one bad thing, as either Hamas supporters or extremists. It creates such tension from two stigmatized sides that it makes coexistence even harder.

I feel there is obviously an overlap that leads to violence. Both communities, but I do not live in a Palestinian or Muslim community, so I cannot really speak much for them. Even though I am one step out of the Jewish community, I observe the news a lot. Obviously, the Jewish

community in America has its guard up. Part of having their guard up is that their leaders are using this vulnerable moment to push their political ideologies forward, to claim that they are protecting Jews by moving towards the right.

I just saw a post from the Republican Jewish Congress, which is Republican American Jews with their conservative interests. And there was a 45% shift in the American public, which has never happened before in history, towards Trump in the last two elections. One of the main reasons is that even liberal Democrat Americans experienced antisemitism as it relates to the campus encampments. It made them feel very unsafe, and they felt that the Biden-Harris administration failed them. So, like a pendulum, when people do not feel supported on one side of the political spectrum, they go to the other side.

Thinking that, it was even funny to see Muslim Arab leaders in Dearborn, Michigan, saying that they were endorsing Trump because they think he will have a better plan in Gaza than what Harris. And I am like, are you kidding me? The man clearly said that he wants to turn it into his next golf resort. I do not think he was even joking. Now, obviously, they are waking up again because Netanyahu and Trump are buddies.

In the American Jewish world, I feel there is pressure on me to stay quiet about the human rights abuses that the Israeli government is committing, as well as the American government is committing. So I feel that there is cultural censorship. I have had memberships at young Jewish professional associations removed because I spoke up online about my opinion on the area. I have lost friends. I have lost other opportunities. It goes both ways, and there is so much pressure, the more of a public figure you are, about what stance you take around this region.

I was even in a writer's fellowship that got so divided from all the issues they have ever faced, from immigration to ICE. So divided internally and externally. They had 100 major writers boycott the organization of their major writer festival unless they take a pro-Palestinian stance. And they eventually canceled the festival that is weeks long. That meant writing opportunities for us as well, for those who are starting.

So, there is a really powerful echo happening in the world. It is scary, I feel like the TV and the media are using us as pawns and are keeping us divided, scared, and afraid. They all have a different agenda of using our fear and saying, well, if you listen to us, we will protect you; it is not protecting us. Because of American society, I mean all Western society now, but really in America, part of our identity is glued to media consumption. It is like another layer of skin. We have reactions internally, and it changes people. I see fanatics, and even in New York, because they are not hiding their opinions. There was this activation because of Trumpism that made a lot of people believe that they could hate freely.

**What makes the conversations about Israel/Palestine and antisemitism difficult to hold?**

It is hard for me to approach this topic; in most cases, I will say that I am not from Israel, so we will not talk about it. I do not want to cause damage to my country, especially with people abroad, who do not know the country and our situation. I am afraid that they will get caught on every word I say and jump to conclusions that highlight their opinions, that we are murderers, that we do this, and so on. Because of that, I need to express a right-leaning position to legitimize our actions.

I believe in human rights, but it is hard for me to comfortably say that in Israel; immediately, I will feel like I would be called out as a leftie, as a traitor. It gives a place for people abroad to say, 'There it is, the apartheid, what you talked about, you admit it.'

There is a knowledge gap. I am not saying this in a pretentious way, nor do I claim to know it all; I learn new things from every conversation. However, in the German context, it feels like many people who had only a loose understanding of this topic before October 7 started to become intensively involved in it, but through a specific lens. For example, pro-Israeli individuals only read Israel-Hayom and generally pro-Israeli media, while others watch Al-Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and read Ilan Pappé, but will overlook other things. I am not saying that one is true and the other is not; I do not want to paint it black and white. I am talking about the lack of more perspectives; that makes it hard to have a nuanced conversation about Israel/Palestine. When I talk to people, I notice their lack of historical knowledge, or that they suddenly end the conversation at a crucial part, because I used triggering buzzwords that clash with their historical narrative. So essentially, what makes it difficult is prejudice and a lack of knowledge.

It is challenging to focus on learning history when numerous events are unfolding, and a sense of urgency to act prevails. People are more focused on stopping what is going on now. The priority is different; I will not read five history books before speaking up against injustice. Some people discredit others when they speak up without having extensive knowledge on the topic. I think that is wrong. However, in more complex conversations aimed at developing a deeper understanding, historical context can be crucial, and it can be frustrating when it is missing from the conversation.

It is tough. For example, the day school I attended had an Israel trip. Before that Israel trip, we had Israel studies, a semester of learning leading up to the trip. There was nothing about the Palestinian experience or the Palestinian treatment at all. A lot of the learning that I had to do about the conflict was on my own time as I got older. However, many people in my life took what they learned at school at face value and have not really pushed beyond that. I see them publish it or share these infographics and pieces that, to them, feel like a justifiable response to the the hate directed at their people. But if you actually look at them, they are pretty

Islamophobic and not super accurate. It can be challenging to distinguish what constitutes truth and what constitutes propaganda. Those conversations are really exhausting.

There are certain people for whom I am willing to discuss the conflict. Generally speaking, there are certain people for whom I can not tell if it is helpful for me to have that conversation or if it is just going to rip something apart. For instance, whether it would be more important to continue the relationship and slowly develop the other person's understanding, rather than speaking my mind. Because that could end many my friendships.

I see myself having some of those conversations with non-Jews. As I mentioned before, I have had friends from college who would have never met a Jew before. Many their questions are like what actually is Zionism? They asked me to explain it to them because they heard it being thrown around, but did not know what it actually meant. Sometimes it is easier (having conversations about the topic with non-Jews) because so many Jewish people have so much baggage attached and so many memories. Such a big part of Jewish culture centers around Israel that it can be easier to take those conversations and make them less direct.

But on the other hand, there is a level of safety felt when you are having this conversation with another Jew. You may understand some of what I am thinking, or your parents do; if not, then people in your life do. We can discuss both the cultural and religious contexts. It is very hard to explain the Jewish connection to Israel if you do not understand Judaism more broadly.

I feel like I have been researching and keeping up with the news for so many years, and yet I still do not really feel qualified to have many of these conversations. I just do not feel like I know enough. There is a lot of information circulating. For instance, I will have conversations with my father where he will have one piece of media, and I will say, "Well, I heard that that one was not actually true from this place." It is very complicated to know what to trust. Many places and people are having these conversations, and I do not feel like I am the most qualified. There is something to be said about I believe very strongly in what I believe in, and I care a lot. But there are some places where I do not want to complicate things further because I stepped into an argument based on something wrong or someone else's. It is just very difficult to know precisely what is going on. All these years later, I am still unraveling some of the propaganda I was taught as a child.

An example of a successful conversation I had (there were a couple) was with a friend (not Jewish) from school who was staying over at my house for a weekend. He asked my mother to explain to him what Zionism was because he did not know. It became a three-hour conversation. We got back to campus,, and he asked me, 'Why did not you tell me your mother lived in Israel?' And then one of my Jewish friends and I looked at each other and went, "Because that would not end well. You would look at me differently. You would treat me differently if you knew." He was kind of surprised. My mother did a lot of peace work. However, that was not a particularly difficult conversation; it was more of an interesting experience.

I have talked a lot with my father about what it means to be a Jew, what it means to be in relation to Israel. I am not sure if this is a US phenomenon, but we have an Israeli day parade every year, where all the schools, camps, and organizations come together to march in New York. It is a huge thing. We discussed what it means to participate there and what is happening with the famine, food aid, and the hostages.

I cannot think of many specific conversations off the top of my head because these have been in the works for so many years. There have definitely been a lot of them, and then less related to the conflict, but I have had a lot of friends ask me when I am going on Birthright, and I have to figure out a way to tell them that I will not be going. Because fundamentally, I do not want to. I have qualms about it. It is a concept. But that is not an easy conversation to have with people who have spent years of their lives in Israel just because they want to. Opposite to that, I have had people at school say really horrible things about what they would do to Zionists in my presence. I am surrounded by Zionists. I am a Jew in New York. So, thinking about what they say about people I know and love. Do I agree with their politics? Not necessarily, but also those threats are not funny.

Within the established Jewish community, it is harder for me because I can empathize and experience the pain that Jews in support of Israel feel because of the loss that is happening to them. I guess there are aspects of their experience I can empathize with. I can not empathize with other parts. I can not empathize with the desire for Israel to remain strong as a state or to succeed in what they are doing. As much as I empathize and feel similarly distraught about those who were murdered and are being held hostage. It does not resonate as much when they cannot recognize or speak to what is happening to Palestinians. In the same way, groups that are doing Palestinian liberation work and solidarity work do not acknowledge the pain and suffering of hostage families, as those groups are often no different. The hostages in Gaza and the Palestinians who are suffering are all suffering under the same empire. It is the fault of those in power. They have different names and different legal entities. But when the other group can not recognize the other and hold each other close, it only makes the hurt worse for me. It is terrifying and it is heartbreaking. It hurts on a level that goes so deep in the body, in a somatic way, that it is hard to hold. It makes me really worried for both people's future safety. If we cannot hold each other, we will create deeper divisions. Then in 80, 90 years, it will just happen again. That is where a lot of the hard-to-hold comes from for me. Being raised with Holocaust education is a really important part of Jewish education because that defined the generation, the two generations before me. My grandparents' generation, my parents' generation, and now mine. There is pain there, too. Because it feels like, what was the purpose of that education if we are just becoming perpetrators of the same thing that we taught that was done to our ancestors and our family members. It is painful to watch the suffering of people. It is painful to watch people I care about and a religion that is part of my daily life make these mistakes and

play out the results of their trauma in ways that will just harm and traumatize other people. It is shameful, really, really shameful. In some ways, it is embarrassing. Especially when I talk to people outside of the US. There are a bunch of shameful things about the United States and our politics that are really embarrassing.

So essentially, what makes those conversations so difficult to hold is people not acknowledging the suffering on both sides. This also comes from a lack of education from a young age. I think we would do better if Jewish education that talks about the creation of the modern-day state of Israel, talks about who else was there. Talk about what happened. It took hundreds of years for the United States to include indigenous history and talk about what actually happened on Thanksgiving. So I am afraid of how long it will take for that conversation to be part of Jewish education, but there are many better ways to go about it than not talking about it.

That being said, it depends on the situation, but I am usually open to discussing with the caveat that it is only with people willing to listen. Because I grew up as a Zionist, and throughout high school, when I understood what that meant for me, I was actively being a Zionist and doing things to support the state of Israel.

I do not feel that I need people nowadays to tell me their experience that much about why they believe what they believe in, because I already know why they believe, because I believed that, that is what we were equally taught to believe. I now have this other perspective and belief they do not know about. So as long as they are willing to put their thoughts aside, these thoughts that we have both experienced and heard something different. I am open to talking about it. It is not really something I want to talk about with my family, and it is not because they are radical on any side. I think, by nature, of them being my family, I do not keep my cool as much with them. Whereas, like my friends or community members, who seek me out to talk about this kind of stuff. I will say I have older friends who specifically seek me out because they know I am willing to talk about it with them and not try to change their mind, but share. I am very open to it, and like I said before, we should talk to people who have different opinions from us. We do not have to agree, but you should understand some aspects of them.

What makes it very difficult is the amount of pain and trauma that is in it and the constant repression on the Palestinian side, I would say, but then also, like re-traumatization of Jewish experiences, the Holocaust, and total instrumentalization of antisemitism, which makes the pain bigger.

The German media does not allow for contradictions or multiple perspectives. The two sides, the occupiers and the occupied, are not treated equally or receive similar attention. There is already the need to fight for recognition and certain narratives, which, from their perspectives,

allowing other sides is not easy. For example, I have been trying to have those conversations with my German family. With my nuclear family, it is different because they know me better, and we have been having political conversations over the last years. So, there was a willingness to talk, and even though it was more difficult at the beginning, we found a way to communicate with each other.

Another thing that makes it very difficult is antisemitism and racism. I feel like both narratives are sometimes legitimized through antisemitism or racism. Then, when it is addressed, it has been compared to other forms of discrimination. I could also feel this in my family, for example. When I have been criticized for antisemitism or alleged antisemitism, it was used while using racist tropes. For instance, my non-German father was told by his friends that it is obvious that he does not understand antisemitism, which is racist.

What also challenges our collective and I am still struggling with is holding space for contradictions and different feelings. Sometimes when people raise criticism, it is shut down, which I find very unhealthy and unsustainable for mobilizing and organizing. Because many people get afraid. Of course, in the beginning, it was a huge question. What do we do with Hamas? How do we condemn or not condemn Hamas? At that time, we discussed it, but we could not agree on how to handle it. It ended in more heated conversations. At that time, we decided to avoid conflict and focus on the commonalities that we could agree on, as well as what was more important to us. However, I feel it should be possible to have these conflicts. But it is a very Berlin common thing, I see it in all the organizing structures or on the left, like anti-racist, and trying to be politically correct. There are always louder voices, and it is difficult to discuss, mostly because they are people who are directly affected or more affected than I, for sure. Personally, at first, I felt a strong sense of urgency to do whatever, but over time, I also began to feel the tension. It can be difficult to voice criticism when there is a genocide happening. Because everything you say might be viewed as minimizing. I guess it is the same with October 7th.

While I was studying, I read extensively on Edward Said, Orientalism, and related topics. Back then, when I was studying social sciences, those texts were not even translated into German. I had to read them in English. But maybe this has changed now. I have come to realize that the German press and academia are somewhat isolated. This is also quite distinct, especially when we enter the general public. I have done some research, and there is crazy academic research about antisemitism and how this fabrication of criticism of Israel is equal to antisemitism. And how this is being put out in politics and school propaganda.

In political science, specifically, there is this highly politicized website, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (The Federal Agency for Civic Education), to which teachers have access. So there is academic backing and justification of political motives, and an Israeli settler colonial

state that is also backed by the media. Especially when you consider the Axel Springer group, this has been ongoing for generations. So, there is very little knowledge about it. When I meet people who have no clue about what is happening in Palestine/Israel, it becomes media slogans that things are too complicated, or they are generalizing certain things and have no clue about certain historical facts because they are not named in the German media. Finding a good starting point for a conversation about it is challenging. I believe the last few years have also educated many people. But maybe that is also really my bubble. Now it has become two-sided.

When we examine it intersectionally, for example, when I look at the school system and how it operates, it tends to depoliticize students in terms of how the world works and how it is globalized. Capitalism is also the foundation of racism. It would not work without the over-exploitation of certain people. This is where racism is the justification for all of that, and there is this political interest. In general, we live in a world that tends to depoliticize people. We also look at the new generations, especially now with the advent of AI and digital technology. With the screen time people consume. People receive quick information in a few seconds that forms the foundation of their knowledge and political views. Then, of course, this algorithm feeds into it, and you live in your own bubble. It just supports itself, and you do not hear any other critical voices around you. It isolates people from each other very much. This isolation is also very problematic for knowledge exchange, growth, and reflection. Then the media feeds this fear and anxiety into it, which makes it really easy for people who hold power to uphold their system and justify inequality.

It is hard to find a safe space because whoever is talking about it or holding the space has an agenda to say this way or the highway, and everyone else is out. Whether you are on the right or left, there really is no space I could think of that would make it a safe space to have a mature conversation without hurting someone. That is how bad this conflict has spread; it is making a war between everyday people. It is making people very, very, very polarized as a result. There is already so much polarization in America, secular, religious, abortion, gay rights, women's rights, so many things. I feel like this is one of them. It was like this when I was growing up, and now it has gone from a pebble to an avalanche.

When I was earlier in college, something inside of me wanted to have that type of engagement. And my father does not usually believe me in a lot of things, but he thought I was onto something. I wanted to create a sponsored group called Pi, Peace in the East, where we talk about Middle Eastern and foreign relations with people who care about the area. But the wider context goes back to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Where once a week, I think I even said it was going to be on a Wednesday, I do not know why Wednesday. For example, we bring pie, eat together, set community agreements, and talk about resources and solutions. I was also

looking to connect with other people from the Swana region. As someone who is, I do not use the term a lot, but like on paper, I am Arab American.

I sent a proposal to every major organization around Israel-Palestinian advocacy, from the left to the right. I did not get one email response of sponsorship, consideration, or thinking about this program. I have not heard anyone steal my idea yet, but I have had a lot of people steal my ideas in the past. My father thought this could be a nonprofit, and I would become the executive director. He was trying to tokenize my gay identity at the time, and it seemed like people do not expect gay people to just talk about this issue, or they expect you all to be on the left. And he was obviously trying to push me to the right. But I was just looking for coexistence and mature dialogue.

Whenever I host events, I screen people with security questions and let them know it is a diverse space. I do community agreements. I was working once with someone who was anti-Zionist, but I identify as non-Zionist. We were trying to hold a Shabbat and a Passover experience, two separate events. And we were really debating over the language to include in the event description. They were immediately like no Zionists, I do not want to deal with it at all. This Jewish organization got complaints and said you cannot see that, or we will remove the event. At the same time, all these liberal Jews in Harlem that I thought would be open to this diverse space were complaining and saying, are you banning me? Where do you see me? They were trying to make it like a political identity that they are discriminated against, as if Zionism is a class to be signified to be discriminated against. I was rolling my eyes, and I was like, listen, there are a thousand Shabbat dinners in New York that you could argue about politics and religion. This is just not one. We have many people across the spectrum, and we do not want the topic on the table so people do not get hurt. This was back in summer 2022, and eventually, I was being cyberbullied by these people I barely knew. The couple that runs this Jewish group in Harlem, one of whom is a rabbi, did nothing to moderate. I stood up ,very professionally and they said, "There are all types of people here." They were first attacking my friend, who was very vocally anti-Zionist. And I said, "We should not remove people and discriminate because they do not think like us."

For speaking up, like many times when speaking up for the underdog, I was thrown out around issues like this. I was told I was making it too much about something else, when I sent a value system. And I was so pissed and annoyed. I cannot tell you how many of those so-called leaders want the attention of being a leader, but when resolving conflicts, they are very passive. They are not interested and will obviously target the weaker and minority voice rather than the one that threatens them more. It is stupid, it is typical, even in the Jewish community. It pisses me off, and I do not want to work with them.

We ended up finding language that worked, and we said this is a space where we came to the conclusion that Israel/Palestine is not on the table. Even though we slightly mentioned to our guests what it took to get there, we just wanted to have a depoliticized space. It was lovely. The people who needed to be there came, and those who did not respect the space did not show up.

Years later, after October 7th, this person (the co-organizer) and I also broke up our friendship because of our views around this issue. They demonize me as if I were not far left enough, I was not safe to be around their trans friends, and I could not come for Shabbat, which I found ridiculous, despite the advocacy work I do. This is the problem with both sides; they see you as the enemy if you are not on their side. To the point they see you so much as the enemy, they see you as the person literally carrying the gun and shooting their people. It is insane. I have been labeled a supporter of Hamas. I have been labeled a Zionist and an IDF. I do not identify with both. People throw their garbage onto you; it is abusive and it is hurtful. You get scared that people will find you online and dox you. Because I have been doxed in college around this area, where they took every profile of every Jewish student on my big campus and said, attack these Zionists. And I never openly identified as a Zionist. That was scary. They were conflating Jews with Zionism. I mean, there are Jews who are Zionists and there are Jews who are not. Many who are not. People do not understand that complexity. It just shows you.

There was a debate between a conservative and a liberal Black woman. She said that the average reading level and comprehension in America is that of a sixth grader. She said we are not dealing with educated people, which is why I am reminded more that there are a lot of idiots out there. She said something beautiful. She says we are not a society that makes informed decisions based on knowledge. We are a society making decisions based on how we feel,, which is very destructive.

So years later, on October 7th, I needed to make a supportive space for the first anniversary. I tried very hard to make it for anyone who felt impacted by October 7th to come and heal. I immediately got rejection from people who are anti-Zionist and far left. I was going to go to this one's person black solidarity Shabbat event the next day. They were claiming not only that they are anti-Zionist, but they do not accept anyone who is two-sided or in the middle, and viva the martyrs and may all Israelis die. I was shocked, hurt, and scared. I was like, I do not want to be around this person. I did not say anything. But when people talk about people in the region, they are being flicked away because they dehumanize them. It makes you suffer because you know these people; even if I do not agree with them politically or religiously, they are still family. To imagine that someone would, God forbid, raise their hands or want them dead.

This is annoying when I have a conversation with someone. I try, but my very insular relatives who think that the world needs to bend to their will and be, for example, all Orthodox Jews. I

remind them that most of the world does not like them, does not support them, and to the point hates their country. And that they need to double down on having so much pride and ego and be realistic about how they navigate the world to be safe and not go everywhere and say, This is who I am. Because it is very polarized, and people can get targeted.

So I remember I did have that morning circle. Some people just went straight into it. But I remember this girl who showed up: an Ashkenazi, liberal, but Zionist. Even in my space, she felt very uncomfortable, if not afraid, to really speak up about what she wanted to say. I said, you are free to say whatever you want. Eventually, she started sharing. But what I did was I said, why do not you find someone you feel comfortable with and break up in a little group and have a conversation rather than as one big group. We only had fewer than 10 people, but still.

### **What are the principles and practices in trying to have those conversations?**

- Let each person talk without interrupting them.
- Let each person figure out their position that they actually stand by.
- The environment should be one of honest discussion and openness from all individuals.
- Do not push one to an opinion or idea they do not align with.
- We need to investigate the situation together, fully connect to it, and consider everything involved.
- Acknowledging that our things are dynamic, and so are our opinions. Opinions are often subject to the current moment.
- Knowing the conversation's setting ahead of time helps one feel comfortable and confident to open up on those topics.
- Before starting to discuss the topic, getting to know the individuals personally is helpful.
- Constantly reminding ourselves that we are humans, we come from a place of compassion; if that is the place we come from, we can talk openly.

In the political world, one has to present oneself differently and put on a mask; one cannot practice humanity that way. It is hard to see a politician and say it is a human, not a position, and a whole team standing behind him.

What I try to do, without explaining the entire history, is to provide, in a few sentences, the background of what I am talking about. Sometimes it can help to look up facts together and ensure we are on the same ground level. Also, learning history reveals that it is complex, and that history itself is always a matter of interpretation and narrative construction. One can learn the same history from two narratives and reach different conclusions and understandings of the events. I therefore think that talking about Israel/Palestine's history is important since it is a historical conflict with specific historical events that led to it in a very particular way.

How I approach those conversations depends on the identity of the person I am talking to. Specifically, when I argue with people coming from the German pro-Israeli position, it is because my Jewish-Israeli identity allows me to do this, even to an extent that I can change their perspective. It happened to me a few times when I was protesting and handing out flyers; I received malicious glances and comments. Once, I started talking with a person who reacted that way; he was German, in his 50s or 60s. At first, he was very confused, and he asked me if it was not dangerous to attend the protest as a Jewish-Israeli. Throughout the conversation, I learned that he really likes Israel and has visited it for a few months. He even spoke a few words in Hebrew. At first, he did not believe me that I was Israeli, and I needed to speak Hebrew to convince him. I struggled to understand his passion for Israel; it did not seem to come from an Evangelistic position. It was more from a place of historical responsibility, an admiration for 'what the Jews built in Israel/Palestine', and so on. My strategy in this conversation was not totally reflective of my morality or ideology, but rather practical. I spoke mainly about the Israeli side and perspective, and what it means to experience that. That is because when we first spoke about the suffering in Gaza, he rejected many things because he did not believe them. Then, I stopped talking with him about the starvation and bombing of Gaza. I explained to him that from the Israeli perspective, the best thing that can happen to us (as well) is a just peace, because violence leads to violence and arguments that follow. To take the position against arming Israel (which was the topic of the protest) will not lead right now to the destruction of Israel by Hamas or another enemy, but will instead force Israel to the negotiating table. Ultimately, it will lead to a better life for all people who live between the river and the sea. To my surprise, he was convinced, because he agreed that it was not easy for Israelis either. The suffering is not comparable, but I believe it was most important to convince him of the political goal of the protest - to stop arming Israel in times of genocide.

Overall, he understood the perspective, but I needed to insist on it. It seems like many people are unwilling to insist and continue talking because it is tiring. I have other conversations when I know I cannot objectively examine the situation, I have family and friends in Israel, and I identify as Israeli. If somebody tells me that Israelis should go back to where they came from, I will try to continue the conversation, but if I realize this is their actual opinion, I will not insist. It is a concept that directly influences me; it is shifting from the general, objective, intellectual to the super personal. Then, I would stop the conversation.

In my three-hour conversation, there was a lot of flexibility. A lot of what happens in the discourse is that everyone has a very clear structure in their minds. So when someone else questions that, they get very defensive. Because of that, it is much harder to have a real conversation. So, fundamentally, if you enter the conversation, be willing to both explain yourself and listen to others. Because many people simply want to hear themselves talk, they assume that everyone agrees with them and must agree with them because, after all, they are clearly right. There is a lot to be said about where you are getting your information from, and

coming into that conversation with information that has been fact-checked. That is not the IDF Instagram page, nor is it similar content.

Willingness to listen and not feel the need to prove their point. Because it is important that when I have these conversations with people, they understand from the beginning that I get it. I would say a lot of people just get it because it is like a shared American Jewish experience. Knowing I am not an authority, this is not my area of scholarship. It is adjacent, like I have done work and projects on things that connect to this. But I am not the type of person who can throw out dates of events; I am not going to be able to give you a timeline. So, being able to go in with an understanding of, like, I do not have all the answers, but I can just give you my perspective that has been shaped by x, y, and z. Because I think a lot of times, going into tense or complicated conversations, like discussing Israel-Palestine, people think they can prove you right or wrong when they have a fact. I could do the same thing, I could spew out facts. Sometimes, certain facts support the conversation, but that does not win the argument, and it should not be an argument. It does not like to win someone from one side to the other. Moving away from that is important. Not like making a checklist of Israel did this, Hamas did this, and then back and forth. That is not the way to have a dialogue.

The one other value I can think about is holding spaciousness. I know that when I have difficult conversations about anything, once the conversation ends, it could take me a couple of days to really process what happened. Because emotions run high sometimes, and a lot of information is said. So, knowing that a dialogue does not have to begin and end with just one conversation is also important, like in Havruta style<sup>9</sup>, partnership learning, where it is an ongoing relationship you develop with someone. You have that spaciousness where you can have a conversation, find a stopping point, and come back together later, if someone requests that. I continued the conversation or circled back on something already discussed, being like we talked about this, and then later realized how I felt about it. But I did not know how I felt at that moment. So holding spaciousness is definitely a big value.

I am a fan of non-violent communication in any kind of eye-to-eye context. I think this is always a good way to start, such as learning how to express your opinion without accusing others and understanding your feelings from your own perspective. I am not a fan of identity politics. I do not think it is always related to identity, but sometimes it is helpful to understand where we each stand. We also need to remind ourselves of the common things and why we question things.

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<sup>9</sup> traditional Jewish practice of studying texts in small groups, where the pair discusses the meaning and application of the text.

I lived in Leipzig before, and there is a very strong anti-Deutsch (anti-German) scene. All the cultural institutions, even though they are non-governmental and somewhat anarchist, are also anti-Deutsch. So, I had a phase of avoiding anti-Deutsch, anti-German sentiment, sorting it out of my life way before October 7th. So I feel most of the people I was with during that time were already very aware of Palestine. I would not say I had so many conversations where we came from totally different perspectives, looking at this. I had those conversations with friends if I felt they (or other people) were approaching me because they knew I was active, and they also had the willingness to learn and understand. I also learned not to fall into a shutting-down mode, which I had experienced from others. So those are good conversations I remember.

Another good conversation I had with my German uncle, who follows the Tagesschau (daily news at 8 pm) and its narrative. It was during the Iran-Israel war. So I felt a lack of empathy from his side, being in a mixed family. He was arguing using common German narratives like Iran is threatening the existence of Israel, Islamism, democracy, and all that. It was challenging, but I felt there was an understanding and more empathy from his side in the end. We began with this specific point from the current situation, but it also expanded to broader topics. Like the Holocaust and how it would be if Jewish descendants were to return to Germany, like the right of return that is also demanded in Palestine. How would it be if all the Jewish grandchildren of Holocaust survivors came to Germany, and would we grant them space? For me, it is the least that Germany could do. But he was not sure, and said, if we start doing this, then what about this conflict and another conflict, and the people who have claimed the land for a few centuries. Where is the start and end? I was like I got this point. But when it comes to Palestine, it is ongoing. It did not stop. People are being displaced the moment we speak; the least we can do is stop it. Then you can think that this demand arises from the current state of conflict. If the conflict were to end, perhaps some people would decide to return. I liked how we could transition out of the fighting mode we started in and explore bigger topics through this.

I think that was a good conversation. I also felt he thought about things differently afterwards. I was already familiar with his perspective, as it is a typical mainstream German view. So perhaps I was less willing to adjust to his perspective because I had been trying to think through this perspective extensively, having consumed a lot of German media. To a point where I had to question. Maybe not the German mainstream, but more like a liberal left Jewish Zionist perspective that is in Germany. I have been influenced by it, trying to understand it, but being organized, and with more radical anti-Zionist communities.

I have tried many different ways. However, it often feels that 90% of conversations fail when someone holds a strongly opposing view to mine. I guess it is just trying to listen to the other person rather than answering with many questions and coming up with dates. I have also started recommending things to watch, such as shows to consume or follow. How do you deal

with that if people feel so stuck and you cannot get through that. Sometimes my response is a bit sarcastic, as if to say, 'You will get there.'

So it is the million-dollar question: how do you have a wholesome conversation? One of the only people I have ever met who has that answer is Dorit Price. I was recently in a very lefty Jewish activist fellowship, and she was one of the guest speakers. Now she does conflict and mediation at the University of Berkeley. She really helped us create community agreements, focus on storytelling, and co-counseling. She helps us explore our identity and our pain in this area. Everyone, regardless of background, was respectful. It was so transformative, and it needs more of it.

During her workshop, you needed your phones away and to be physically present to the point that they were discouraging you from being on Zoom. You had to be hyper-focused on three periods of your life: how your Jewish identity developed and your relationship to Israel-Palestine. People were taking turns to share, responding to what they heard to confirm and affirm it, giving support if needed, and rotating in groups of three. I cannot speak for her because she is the expert. I was so surprised with a topic like that because I had so much fear and qualms about being triggered, afraid, and hurt. I just remember saying I was not hurt at all, I was not offended, I was not hurt, I was not scared. I felt relieved. Even in our small cohort of less than 12 people, we had people who were very anti-Zionist, to people who were very Zionist, to people like me who were non-Zionist. There are still all on the bracket of left-leaning Jews, but they are a spectrum. That is the thing that everyone needs to realize that everything in life, I believe, is a spectrum: race, gender, orientation, and politics. But society is slow to realize that; they just think everyone is or should be like them.

### **Interpretation of non-Zionist**

It is my own definition. There are many places I would not say it because I am scared I will be attacked, because in their mind, they will think that I am not on their side. So I keep it to myself. I do not want to see a religiously dominated country, whether it is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, in that region, as it has historically been; that form of religious supremacy hurts everyone. So the non-Zionist part is not seeing Jews as the majority of the country. I believe that everyone, regardless of their religion, has the right to live in that country if they want to practice in peace, of course. I also feel that there is a horseshoe effect, a theory that, like a horseshoe (U-shaped), people on the far left and people on the far right have more in common than the middle. That means that they are both very polarized about certain things. The anti-Zionist camp, in a different way, even though there is a spectrum, there are anti-Zionists who want to see a lefty equilibrium society, but it still is a Palestinian state, and the people in power in the region want to see it as an Islamic extremist state, and they are not even on board. Just like Zionists, there are Zionists who want to see it as only for Orthodox settlers, and then there are Zionists who want to see it as liberal. People do not even understand that there is a spectrum of Zionism.

But regardless of that history, whether you know it or not, the anti-Zionist camp wants to see a replacement of a country that is Palestinian, that is going to be a Muslim majority. That is not safe for me and for millions of people either. I just feel that if it is a democracy, ideally, it could be a religious country because it is always going to be, but not a country dominated by religious values. It is much longer and complex.

### **How did you learn about Israel/Palestine and antisemitism?**

I was born into it. I became conscious of the conflict in 2014, when a missile was sent to my city. I will never forget it. I think it is one of the most traumatic things when you are young and understand that there is someone who wants to kill you. It is a huge shock that shapes your way of viewing life. That creates the Israeli ethos, the feeling that here we are under the same rooftop, we are all in this problem, we need to figure that out, and fight against it. We should think about how we can live an everyday and quiet life without wars and end it. As a citizen, you do not know how to do it; it is a fantasy. The politics in Israel is alive and everywhere. Because the reality in Israel is such chaos, people know they must have an opinion; however, it does not mean they are necessarily politically educated and open-minded.

What I remember from the school education in Israel until I left is that pretty early on, we were educated about the holocaust and the European form of antisemitism. The education system has an evident Zionist imprint, like the revival of the Hebrew language and the establishment of Israel post-holocaust as a safe haven. It disregards a personal aspect of what it is like to experience antisemitism.

Regarding Israel/Palestine, I talked about it early on with my parents, who are pretty progressive. One of the reasons we left Israel when I was young was that I would not have to serve in the army. I remember conversations with an Israeli friend who always talked about how Israel is the US's pet. I didn't completely understand him, so I talked with his dad about it. At the ages of 13 and 14, I began reading about politics and became invested in conversations about it. I knew that the conflict existed, but I noticed that it is not really discussed in Israeli society. The entire world talks about it; we live in it, and it is happening, but at the same time, it is not happening to us. There is a certain alienation from this.

Back then, I never doubted in any way that the situation could be different. What was very evident was the military presence. I remember that from about second grade, I already knew what I wanted to do in the army. Everyone was talking about what they wanted to do in the army from an early age, discussing their parents' experiences in the army, and so on.

I have always lived in very Jewish spaces. For example, I went to Chabad for nursery school. There was always a level of connection among all my friends related to these countries, as many of them were first- or second-generation immigrants. My family has Israel because that is our nation, the Jewish nation.

I remember being four or five years old, and there was a little country parade. I had a sash that had an Israeli flag on it because what else was I if not the closest to Israeli? Again, my mother made aliyah, a decision that was always discussed in our household. Then, I am going to today's school, where I am learning a lot about Israel, but always in the context of Judaism. The prevailing narrative was that the Jews tried and tried to make peace, and the Palestinians refused every time, and it is because of them that there is no two-state solution.

Obviously, it is not that simple. If you look at the maps and see what happened, how was this land distribution looking. There are many things that we did not discuss. We did not talk about the Nakba. We did not talk about the Intifada. It was very much in line with how you love this nation. A lot of it was in the context of the Shoah. Like reading Exodus (by Leon Uris), the book is set in the post-World War II era. A lot of media and frameworks in which the underlying goal is that you will go to Israel, and then you will feel complete, holy, and connected in your faith. You kind of see that everywhere. You even see that in Fiddler on Earth. It is quite literally wherever you go in Jewish media, especially in the early 1900s, that finding and reaching that level is all about. It is also definitely present in my family now. My great-grandfather moved his entire family to Israel, which was then known as Palestine, when they were young. My grandfather was young enough that he did not really remember it, but it was definitely a part of their life. Lots of Zionism was inherited.

At summer camp, there was also Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) and Yom Israel (Israel Day) and all that stuff. We had brief conversations about the lasting elements of the conflict and what they look like. This was in the early 2020s. Our counselors (in camp) did a skit, and it was something along the lines of "this is Yom (Day) propaganda" or something like that. I remember having those conversations with my friend afterward and thinking, 'Oh yeah, this is happening,' and discussing what it means to be connected to Israel and to make aliyah. There was a girl whose family had just moved. So, the question of why they had moved, who has the right to immigrate, who has the right to become a citizen, and how this is complicated by religion.

I attended a public high school where I did not have many of these conversations. Except that, like once a year, something would happen in relation to Israel, and everything would be blown up. People would be saying antisemitic things. People would be saying Islamophobic things, and it would just be really messy and complicated. Furthermore, the place that I sit, as a Jewish person who is generally speaking, pretty liberal, means that everyone believes that I have the same opinions that they do. All of the people who were Jewish and more conservative

believed I was with them. All the liberal people believed I was with them. It was just a highly complex discussion to have. Then, on October 7th, the conversation changed. But it was a lot more of what I just mentioned, with much higher stakes.

The Palestinian narrative was in some level of conversation. One of my mom's best friends from when she lived in Israel is a Palestinian man. There is definitely an awareness; my parents are pretty liberal. But according to my father, at least, I did not want to talk about it growing up. I do not remember this, but it did not seem that I was super interested in having conversations about the state. So we did not really have them until I got older. At that point, I remember having a conversation where I said, 'You did not tell me everything.' They (parents) were like, well, we would have told you if you had asked. Which is a complicated state to be in, especially when different places in your life are pushing very particular things, whether you question them or not.

I probably started thinking more critically around the ages of twelve and thirteen. By the time I was sixteen or seventeen, I was thinking in a lot more detail. It has been a journey. It was right around the age of thirteen when I left my day school. So that is also part of it. But I think I definitely did not really understand everything that I was seeing and experiencing—or bearing witness to—until I was in high school.

There is definitely some level of being a Jew in America (meaning being Jewish in a way that is not Israel-related). But my rabbi brings up Israel almost every week in his sermons. I was a little kid who liked American Girl dolls. So, I learned about Rebecca and what it was like for her family to be in a tenement on the Lower East Side. There was some of that cultural understanding of what it means to be a Jewish person in New York. There is a reason that every year, during Pesach (Passover), we say 'Bashana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim' (Next year in Jerusalem); it is all about going to Jerusalem. I would have gone to Israel with school, and then COVID happened. So that got canceled. I would have gone again in high school if I had stayed at that high school. I would have gone again to my summer camp if I had stayed longer. It is often framed as the culminating moment of your Jewish identity to go to Israel and study it.

I also have family in Israel, including those in Jerusalem and throughout the country. There are third and fourth cousins, so it is less immediate. But we definitely have people there that we care about. We have people that we worry about when places are bombed. I guess I do not really know what it means to be a Jew in America and to be in American institutions that are in some way not connected to Israel.

If Israel's existence were not threatening anyone, I would obviously feel very different about the American Jewish connection to Israel. There is a lot about the current and past displacements, making it harder to believe it is a safe nation for you. This is a nation that's supposed to protect

you when you are actively sending away and stripping rights from other people in your midst. I definitely understand that in a post-Shoah world and a world that has so many different conflicts and incidents of anti-semitism. Why it could be a relief for some people to know that there is a Jewish state that will always take them in. I do not have a perfect solution for what happened after the freeing of the concentration camp, where people had no home to go back to. I can definitely understand how things unfolded, but I am not sure how I would feel about it. Nationalism as a concept is a really fine line between when you stop thinking critically about a government. Fundamentally, we all need to exercise caution. However, I would feel better about it if the safety did not come at the expense of others.

I have had some interesting conversations with my family about whether knowing that Israel exists makes you feel safer. A cousin of mine said, "I live in New York, which is one of the most Jewish cities in the world. There are enough of us here. I do not really feel the need to go anywhere else."

We had a lot of education, often around things like what antisemitism is and what it looks like. Which as a child, I did not understand why we were learning it. I grew up in a community that was very accepting of Jewish people. I live about an hour and 15 minutes away from where I grew up now, and there are many synagogues in that area. It is not like Brooklyn. But there are Jews, it is not unknown. I did not experience antisemitism growing up. I went to synagogue, Hebrew school, and Jewish sleepaway camp. I had a community of Jewish people, and I had people who were not Jewish in my life. So I did not totally get what the whole noise was about.

That goes back to the ancestral trauma, about trying to prepare for the worst, and maybe turning things into something bigger than they are. Antisemitism is real, it exists, and people experience it. I do not think they experience it on as large a scale as we are led to believe. Unconsciously, for Jewish educators, part of having antisemitism as such a large education tool, of learning about it as a tool. Conditioned us to believe that it was a true and honest daily threat, that people every day somewhere are experiencing antisemitism. I am sure there are people in the world who do it every day, but it is not the norm. That is not regular or normal. That was continuously drilled into me when I was in high school, in a Jewish youth group, I was in BBYO. Antisemitism was talked about a lot there.

Israel was also a part of my American Jewish education from a young age at Hebrew school. Once a month, we had this program called Drop Everything for Israel (DEFI). In the middle of a weekday night in Hebrew school, the education director, whom I love, would come into the classroom and say, "Oh my god, DEFI, like we have to drop everything for Israel." So we would stop our lessons, and the entire Hebrew school would go upstairs and get together to spend some time doing Israel education. For example, we would learn about modern-day culture and

geography. I do not remember many details about my elementary school education in Israel during those programs, other than it being a big deal.

But then, in high school, in a Jewish youth group, it became more about learning about Jewish culture and pinkwashing about it being a good place for gay people. Talking about the importance of military service, it also plays into the military-industrial complex. In my sleepaway camp in elementary school, middle school, and high school, they had an exchange program where Israeli kids would come and attend the Jewish summer camp, and some of the staff and counselors would also be Israeli. So, another way of sewing this almost magical, beautiful other land that we can all go to and be a part of, and a place just for Jews, was kind of the vibe around it.

Israel was a significant part of it; it was not the only significant part of it. I think that I thought it was more significant than it actually was. I spent three weeks in Israel one summer in high school, basically just on a three-week propaganda trip, doing tourism and learning about how cool and great it is in this country. And you could do this too. You could be here too, and you could make aliyah and talk a lot about making aliyah. I never had that desire. I did not feel like it was my home at all. I thought it was historically significant and important because of what I was taught. Which I still believe is important in both a historical and a biblical sense. But I was not so super sold on it. Like the American dream, they were selling the Israeli dream to us. But I was sold on that; I was not really interested in that. I thought it was cool and important that it existed until I got to college. In college, I was exposed to other options, learned what Palestine was, and who Palestinians are. That is when that aspect of my Jewish identity started to shift. Because I still had a really strong identity around prayer, holidays, and culture. Like Ashkenazi culture, for me, those are the main factors of my Jewish identity, or like my connection to land and the living earth, which is a really huge part of my Jewish identity.

In college, I was really involved in Jewish student life on campus, both from attending services and also from doing Jewish learning fellowships. I was close with one of the rabbis on campus. I did not feel called to what would happen on campus around Israel. But what I did feel called to was, by nature of the stuff I studied in undergrad around activism, and essentially learning what it means to be a leftist. Having that academic access to all this knowledge and expansiveness led me to learn about it. It was super uncomfortable at first to experience the critique of something that seemed so obvious to me growing up. I did not seek it out. It kind of just found me. Once I found it, I still did not seek it out. It was a slow burn for me throughout college, where the candle was lit at the very beginning of college, and it was there, but not the focus.

On my junior year, I went on the March of the Living.<sup>10</sup> I also went on it during my senior year of high school, which is a significant connection. It is super intense. You are feeling things and seeing things that you are not prepared for. The first time I went, I was a senior in high school, so I was not prepared for it; I was more prepared for it in college because I had been there before. In high school, I did the full trip. So the week in Poland overlaps with Yom HaShoah (the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day). Then, there is a second week of the trip that not everyone goes on, during which you spend a week in Israel doing Israeli tourist things. Under the guise of while you are there, you are also celebrating Israeli Independence Day and Israeli Veterans Day. There is a huge party while you are there to celebrate Israeli Independence Day. So there is this flow and emotional manipulation, where you are at your lowest low, seeing one of the darkest places on the planet. Then you are flung into celebration, party, and 'we are in the promised land, we did it.' So it was an amazing trip in high school. I experienced a lot of PTSD that did not get the attention that it needed from adults. They did not have post-program support. In college, I studied abroad in Berlin and got a grant to research the Holocaust and memory. So I went back to the March of the Living.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day, you do the death march from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II Birkenau. So the march that everyone in Auschwitz took to go to their death was along the train tracks. Then, when you get to Auschwitz II Birkenau, there is a huge ceremony. I had not really understood it in high school when I went, but with this new perspective in college. I observed how the entire service and ceremony ultimately focused on how great we now have Israel. There were politicians from Israel and other countries there. All of it led up to, thank goodness we have Israel. That is where it fully clicked for me, where I understood, I do not think we have done it. I do not think we have solved things like they said we did. I know that genocide still happens. So if they are saying that because we have the state of Israel, we have fixed antisemitism and hatred around the world, something's wrong. That was like the official tipping point for me. Then I started going to protests when I got back to New York. To protest military tech for Israel. I wanted to sink my teeth into it, but the pandemic started in my senior year. I had slowly started to read more and seek out more. Then I got involved with JVP (Jewish Voice for Peace) during my service year. Because a friend in my cohort was really involved, and I have been involved ever since. I have done the deep dive. I can confidently say that I am a leftist and I am here for liberation; we have so much work to do. I drank the Kool-Aid as a kid. I was part of it and advocated for things I think are horrendous today. My upbringing told me to do those things, and now I know better.

I do not remember a specific moment when I learned about it. I was doing my bachelor's with a regional focus on the Middle East. I was in Leipzig, a very anti-Deutsch (anti-German) white city. I first became aware of it because I felt there was something off, but I do not remember

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<sup>10</sup> A week-long Holocaust remembrance trip in Poland with a cohort where you visit concentration camps, death camps, labor camps, and the cemeteries.

actively reading about it. I just thought, why is it a thing? What is the problem, somehow? I read about it and I educated myself a bit. I had a course on Ghassan Kanafani where we read his novels, and I wrote an essay about the right of return. That was around 2019, when I first read about it. Then, Sheikh Jarrah happened, so we went to demos in Leipzig.

There were already cancellations going on; it was the time when it began. There was a radio that they disinvited a label from Ramallah. People and friends in Berlin were asking me to speak on the radio. So I got in touch with this radio. It was a COVID project, a community radio station. Back then, I was mostly reading about it and following the news a bit, but not really being organized, except for attending the Nakba demos. Like I said, I have been a bit organized with diaspora communities; I have not been organized in one specific group; it was more of crisis management, which is something I would like to reflect on, and it is a wish of mine to find a more sustainable structure to build an organized community with, rather than reacting to the crisis. In addition to that, we hosted radio shows during that time.

I have two friends from Ramallah whom I learned a lot from through everyday conversations, for example. They go back and forth, experiencing the reality of everyday situations under occupation, such as checkpoints. They are both artists and musicians. You can feel it in the art, their experiences of witnessing people getting shot. The privilege of knowing them and hearing them has also contributed to my knowledge. Because you can read a lot but would never understand what it really is, I mean, I still cannot, but at least a bit.

Definitely school propaganda all the way through. A justification for having an Israeli colonial settler state. But then later on, through my queer friends that is built on leftist thoughts and theories that I had interest in and studied during university. It was definitely shaped through my queer friends and family in Berlin, who were quite clear and vocal about it before October 2023.

To be honest, at school, it was mostly just school propaganda. But I was also like a young kid with my own problems. At school, it was the same issue; it was taught so quickly. I remember having two or three lessons about it. So it (Israel/Palestine) was not a huge thing at my school, at least. Back then, we did not talk much about discrimination anyway. So antisemitism was not really covered. But I remember having Israel-Palestine (as a topic) in school and hearing about it for the first time. However, I graduated a long time ago, so it was quite a while back. A great deal has changed since then. Now you definitely have more coverage on antisemitism or any kind of racism at school. But back then, it was so little and there was no sex education properly done, and similar things. It felt very conservative. But I did not grow up in Berlin, so maybe that is also the case.

My lived experience. I lived in both countries. I have seen how it has impacted me. There is also antisemitism that is projected from the Jewish community towards Jews of color, Mizrahi

Jews, and Sephardic Jews. Historically white Zionist Ashkenazis have been perpetuating oppression and white supremacist values from European society into the modern state of Israel. I know that history very well. Simply what happened in the 50s and the 60s, the Ma'abarot. <sup>11</sup> The Mizrahi refugee camps had a million Jews from the Arab world who were kept in inhumane living situations. All the new white Jewish settlers were given public housing.

As for the Yemenite Jewish plight, the Israeli government was so afraid of the Yemenite community's religious influence that it wanted to destroy the religious community to the point of enforcing secularism. So they segregated Yemenite Jews into small towns and big cities. There is an ugly truth that Israelis who are passionate about the country do not want to hear, but it is being popularized. It is called the 2000 Yemenite baby tragedy. They were stealing babies and giving them to Ashkenazi families after the war. Many stories are still not being heard of those babies growing up in a very racist society, who feel that they do not belong. I felt that for so many parts of identity in a very white Ashkenazi majority school. So, Jews often see that antisemitism is an external thing, and they do not talk about how it is internal. The only time they talk about it internally is when they think you are a critic of Israel; they call you antisemitic. So there is that complexity.

- **Do you think there is more for you to learn on the topic?**

Yes, always. I know the topic generally, from things I heard or was told; I did not truly investigate the topic. It is important for me at some point in my life to try to be objective and understand what is going on on the other side. Not that, but also on my side, behind all of the big headlines. Regarding antisemitism, I would like to know the frequency of it, where it is happening, the state of Jews abroad, and whether it has actually worsened in the last few years. Mainly because I want to figure out my position in the world and also because I am concerned for my personal safety, of where I can travel and where I cannot.

Yes, 100%. I feel like, although I was active about it from a young age, long before October 7, and was active in various movements, I always learn something new from reading or talking with people. You can always learn more about it.

Absolutely. I want to understand more about the effect of the media. I want to learn more about the history before 1900, though that was less explicit. There were different powers in charge at that time. But learning more about the pre-2000s. I know a lot about what it was like in the 90s when my parents were there. But beyond that, all I really know is what I have read in history articles, which means from more primary source information. There is a lot more for me to understand when it comes to Palestinian lived experiences. For instance, there are several memoirs, plays, and poems that I would like to read. There is a lot more that I feel like I need to do.

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<sup>11</sup> Immigrant and refugee absorption camps established in Israel in the 1950s.

Of course. I mean, it is not even just the 75 years of Israel being an ethno-state. What about the culture of the people living there before that? There is so much there in terms of history. I think there is so much to be learned as a Jewish educator for young people and adults, about how I can incorporate what I think needs to be incorporated into education in a way that is palatable and acceptable in institutional nonprofit Judaism.

There is so much learning for me and everyone about if and when this ends, because there has to be an endpoint. I hope. How are we going to remember it? What are we going to do with what we have done? How are we going to reckon with our actions? Especially as an American who knows what my tax dollars are doing and who they are killing, and I have to pay my taxes. However, along with all the other reckonings that have been happening in the United States over the past decade, which have been building for way longer than that, I would say since the civil rights movement. Is this going just to be another sentence in the history book, or how can we actually leverage this situation to change, to do something that actually honors the people who have been martyred? There is definitely learning there.

Yes, of course, there is always more to learn, definitely. I would like to understand and learn about the overall geopolitical powers. It is happening so fast, like with Syria, the Iran war, and Lebanon. I feel there are so many changes and power games happening behind the curtain, and they are all connected to each other. So, this is something I would like to continue to research further. Of course, like Palestine, there is so much to learn. It has a very long history and is part of the German memory culture. I have been researching that topic specifically. I have done a video project on the fight against the war on antisemitism and memory culture in Germany, kind of post-Second World War, early German-Israeli relations. Like the reparation agreement and early weapon exports from Germany to Israel, for the Six-Day War. So this has been something I researched about, and I wrote an essay on it.

I also read chapters of two books on antisemitism. One of them is *Safety through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism*, written by American anti-Zionist leftists. In the book, there is a whole section on Israel-Palestine, in which they emphasize the importance of not ignoring antisemitism and how we can fight it together within a broader leftist movement. It made me understand some of my own antisemitic biases, also when it comes to Israel, which was really good.

The other book, *Strange Hate. Antisemitism, Racism and the Limits of Diversity* was more about the general criticism of identity politics and how both right and left-wing activism tend to exclude and tokenize minorities. They talked about how Jewish people are trapped in the middle because they are somehow more likely to be excluded from the left and, at the same time, instrumentalized by the right, how selectivity can never be solidarity, and a leftist ideal.

## **Interpretation of Zionism and anti-Zionism**

I know there are many definitions of Zionism, but for me, Zionism is the ideology and belief that there should be an ethno-nationalistic Jewish state, whatever that looks like. So the nationalist idea that there can just be an Israeli state that is exclusive to Jewish people. There can be many different forms of Zionism, but what is at its core is having this exclusionary idea that there should be ethnic-religious supremacy. I am anti-nationalist, in general. In defining myself as an anti-zionist, I reject this idea as any other form of nationalism.

For me, first of all, it is not the question of the people, but the people of the state. If people say Israel has no right to exist, how I interpret it is that it does not mean the people have no right to exist where they are or that they should all leave, or not exist. This is like a political question about the state. When I say Israel has no right to exist, it has no right to exist the way it does in occupying Palestine and parts of Syria, and other countries it had occupied in the past, Egypt and Lebanon, and right now it is executing a genocide.

It has a nationalist ideology where there are people who can go live there based on religion and ethnicity, like American Jews. Even non-Jewish people can go to live there, but Palestinian people who were born there cannot. Then, for me, it has no right to exist this way. I am against nation-states anyway, so I do not feel any nation-state in this world has a right to exist. That is why I also do not like this discussion; states do not have a right. They never had a right to exist. Borders are violent and colonial.

It is also a discussion for Palestine, which we are not there yet because the idea of having a Palestinian state is not realistic at all at this point. I also do not like nationalism within Palestinian ideas or movements. In the past, Groups like PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) were less nationalistic, which was a bigger threat to Israel because of their general left-socialist ideology and being connected to other liberatory movements in the region (PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) for example), so for Israel it was very convenient to support Hamas in order to weaken the left resistance, and as we see it now have a reason to kill so many people. I do not like the idea that Palestine should be for just Arab Muslims. Because there are Bedouins, and there are Jewish Palestinians, I mean, they all speak Arabic, but again, it is a nationalistic idea. There are Kurds in Palestine; an example is the family names Al-Kord and Al-Kordi, which have been assimilated into Arabic society. I do not think nationalism can save us, so I do not support it wherever. But as I said, I do not blame Palestinians for it.

I see it (nationalism) can be a common reaction to genocide. So Jewish people needed this moment where they could just save themselves. After a genocide, there is no trust in other people, I would say, a similar place to where Palestinians are right now, where they do not believe in other people. Because throughout the decades, there has been no support, just

oppression and persecution. Other models in the world can teach us differently. For example, the Kurdish resistance also pursued nationalism, but they understood that this was not the way to achieve freedom. So now the Kurdish liberation movement is aiming more towards autonomy of land and a basic democratic confederacy. But for Palestinians, there is no moment or possibility of even dreaming and imagining differently in this current moment. Throughout the decades, I do not think that Palestinians have been given the chance to imagine how they would like to live on the land because of the constant oppression. So, I am not there to judge how they should believe in their liberation. However, from an outside perspective, I have criticisms, which I think are legitimate and do not take away their right to resist in the way they are doing.

For sure. Right now, it is important for me to learn more about Palestinian culture because it is being erased, and there is a genocide happening. It feels like whatever we do, it is not being stopped. So it feels quite helpless. For me, it is about finding power through learning to oppose this extinction. Like the watermelon symbolizes that Palestinians are like seeds, and they will grow elsewhere and not be forgotten.

I took a fellowship sponsored by a very big organization against antisemitism about how antisemitism manifests in cyberbullying. It was very intense. I do not think I want to delve into it more because it is so much trauma, and it is a monster like queerphobia and every type of hate that is not going to be dismantled in my lifetime. Unfortunately, it has impacted me, and I want to numb the situation so I do not have to experience more suffering.

There is this narrative amongst Jews that we have to suffer as a people in order to have faith, and that was what I grew up with. I am sick of suffering for a God, I am an agnostic, but a God that does not care about us. We are constantly told that our suffering is our punishment because we did not cling close to God, which is bullshit. Because when we are religious, we are targeted, and when we are not religious, we are targeted. Again, like I said, leaders weaponize Jews' identity, they gatekeep you, and they say you cannot leave being Jewish. I feel similar to the queer community, just like you cannot leave being queer. True, but that does not mean you control my political identity and tell me that in order to be queer, I need to believe X, Y, and Z. If we are talking about liberation, everyone should be able to be entitled and be subscribed to their own political thinking as long as it is not oppressing other people. That is the only time that it should not be allowed. I am even tired of thinking about the topic. But I just think the only thing that would help is more opportunities like this, where the wider public could see our stories and faces, to really understand how it impacts you.

I remember arguing with a rabbi. I wanted to do a mental health panel at his synagogue, talking about my former Orthodox experience. He was so scared of my queer political identity that he was trying to censor me and saying, "Why do not you talk about mental health without it

personally affecting your identity?" Which is ridiculous. You cannot separate it. I remember I said back to him, "Rabbi," I said, "Can you tell me how antisemitism affects you without you being a Jew?" He had this light bulb moment, you cannot separate that it is impossible. Then I did not know what you were expecting of me, and he felt threatened by that, so he canceled the sponsored weekend I was trying to organize. He is again a rabbi who was passive, of a very well-known synagogue in New York. I thought he was educated and modern enough to understand. He expressed that he feared conservative audiences would not approve of me. And I said, "Rabbi, is that a you problem or a them problem?" Because if it is a 'them' problem, remember you are a rabbi, you have influence over them to say we need to welcome the stranger, which is a core value of your religion. Also, I told him, I am not stupid. I am not going to talk about lefty politics to a conservative audience. It is a losing battle. So too, I am not there as in the way society tries to demonize me and say everywhere I go, I have this big gay agenda.

People really politicize your identities. Hence, that is why I do not talk about being connected to Israel/Palestine, because it is oppressive and it is exhausting. Why would anyone think in their right mind that I want to walk around and talk about painful things? When does it become a conversation? This is about rehumanization, the things that are in common, that I am interested in and passionate about, and that bring me joy. I even have a hard time setting boundaries, specifically for people who ask questions that are breaking my privacy. So that they can gossip about me, point a finger at me, label me further, and use my emotional labor. No one deserves that.

- **Do you feel like you are discouraged or encouraged to learn about one over the other, and by whom?**

Learning about it right now is not one of my top priorities; I am in a different period of my life. I plan to travel a bit soon and see what happens there. I want to observe if Israel/Palestine actually interests people and to talk with them; to see it for myself through people and not through numbers and surveys. It could be that inside Israel, we make a bigger mess than it actually is in the world.

The fact that Israelis are standing up and talking about the Palestinian perspective does make me interested and wonder about it. But at the same time, every time a significant event occurs, we distance ourselves from other perspectives, marking them as irrelevant, and are busy caring for our loved ones and others. For some of it, I believe it is done strategically and psychologically to affect us. We think that what happened to them had to happen, in a way of fate; that way, we state it as irrelevant to our reality. For example, Gaza post-October 7th is completely destroyed, and I am sure there is a tremendous amount of destruction that makes it difficult to live in. I assume many families experience disaster regardless of their connection to the situation. But then I view it from the Israeli perspective, the soldiers and what they (Hamas)

did to us; then I think, how can I even think about the other side when I see what they did to us, to my life, to how I grew up.

Everyone is against us (in Gaza), there are two million people, and each one of them would attack me with a knife just because I am Jewish and Israeli; I am almost 100% sure it is the truth, and I am terrified of it. I go back to my life experience, knowing everyone is against us. I have seen what happened in the Gaza envelope on October 7, and I am horrified. It completely changed everything.

I am very interested in discussing the topic with people, especially those from Palestinian backgrounds. Probably the most interesting conversations I had on Israel/Palestine and the current situation were with friends, acquaintances, and Palestinians I met. The type of people I usually struggle talking with and have the most difficult conversations with are mid-20s dogmatic Germans, who are often not willing to have an open conversation about the topic. Their behavior is typically arrogant, and they sometimes assume that their knowledge is definitive. This conversation becomes not a matter of exchanging knowledge and discussing ideas but of their explaining to me their opinion, which they consider to be the right one. That is quite frustrating. It had happened to me when talking with Palestinians as well. But because the conflict in general, and especially the current situation, has a very different impact on Palestinians and Germans, I receive it differently. When a Palestinian gives me a speech, I will try to listen to him, as opposed to when a German explains to me that I am a settler-colonialist because I grew up in Israel. I know other Israeli people and family members who avoid talking about it, especially with strangers and friends, because it is painful and difficult. Sometimes I also do not have the capacity to discuss the topic, but I try to be open to discussions because of the lack of honest and informed conversations. I highly value the conversation medium, and I feel that it has been fading away, often replaced by various dogmas and facades.

I feel comfortable talking about it in the context of protests or declarations. I met two of my good Palestinian friends through such conversations. But they are also mixed with fear and hypersensitivity from my side, because I also experience a fear of rejection that people would not like to talk with me, regardless of my opinion and my activism, because of my identity as a Jewish-Israeli. At times, it is because those individuals have lost family and relatives. However, I also had some really good conversations; people commented that they were happy to have met me, because, unfortunately, there are rarely left-wing Israelis who support a just peace. I was happy to get to know their perspective and that they are open to a conversation, which often surprised me. I met someone whose family is currently in Gaza, and still, he was open to talking. We talked and talked for a few hours; it was a meaningful conversation. Initially, I did not think he would talk with me or was up to talking. Nonetheless, even though I think it is important, I hold all respect for Palestinians who do not have the headspace to talk with Israelis.

I started protesting in 2018/2019. The first protest I attended was Nakba Day; I went alone, which was quite scary. I did not talk with anyone, and I did not wear any identification objects that can signal that I am Jewish or Israeli, like the Star of David or a Kippah. Yet it was a scary experience. I can fully understand those who are scared of it. I think it is complicated to shrug it off; it is not just a couple of Palestinian flags. There is an actual fear and frustration; it is a challenging environment. It was important for me to go there, also as an Israeli, even if it is not publicly, to destigmatize the topic. Nowadays, I no longer feel unsafe when attending protests. What is usually harder for me is that I disagree with some messages, and most of the time, if that is the case, I will leave early. However, due to the topic's urgency, it feels important enough to attend the protest to stop what is happening right now, even though I disagree with some of the positions. One example of the messages I disagree with is 'Yemen Yemen, make us proud, make another ship turn around'. There are a few issues with this slogan, but one that I think many protestors do not think about is that it equates the Houthis with Yemen. I met a Yemenite who lost his leg because of the Houthis, and he was really mad at this slogan. There are other messages to shout that are less controversial.

Another slogan that I find problematic is 'Hurriyat hurriyat earabiat Palestina' ('Freedom Freedom, to Arab Palestine'), which gets into an exclusivist, nationalist dynamic. Although I am someone who is against nationalism, because I think it leads to many problems and tragedies, I understand people's need for a nation-state, and I will not tell a Palestinian, a Kurd, or any person without a state not to fight for their national sovereignty; it is not my place to. But still, when a chant sounds to me as if it promotes an exclusive nation-state in some way or another, I will feel uncomfortable. I would not support a protest calling for a 'German Germany' or a 'Kurdish Kurdistan' either. Even if the protest fights for establishing a nation-state, it is problematic to call for an 'Arab' nation-state, just like Israel and other countries should not be exclusivist nation-states. That is usually the type of nuance I find hard to reach in many conversations. I also think that similar ambiguous chants, such as 'from the river to the sea,' do not serve as a good political strategy, regardless of whether one agrees or not.

I definitely feel like it is important to know (about one another). It is discouraging to read about what has been done in my name. It can be confusing at times to see all these education programs and to understand how the places I have visited fit into that framework. It feels like the necessary task to learn and be more educated. It is a disillusioning process, it is a difficult process, and it is a tiring process. I cannot say that it helps me sleep at night, which is obviously not what it should be doing because this is conflict, war violence. Those are challenging topics that deserve to be addressed and understood. It is definitely not the most motivating in terms of having faith in the world at a time when so many horrible things are happening. So I can not say it excites me. It is upsetting to hear, and it is supposed to be upsetting to hear. However, it requires a great deal of resolve.

From the American Jewish perspective, there is definitely a culture (in which I do not think of myself, since I was out of it by that point in time) of places where Jewish organizations feel really compelled to make sure that by the time students go off to college, they are ready to be good little soldiers, whether that is actually enlisting in the IDF or being very adamant about Israel and maintaining Israel's innocence and all of that stuff. I was at the Jewish Museum in Philadelphia, and a book was available that discussed what every Jewish student should know before attending college. It was all about knowing how to defend Israel. I have talked to adults who have said that they would be okay with Jewish college students having absolutely no connection to tefillah (prayer) or a traditional understanding of Judaism. However, they would not accept an observant Jew who was at an encampment on a college campus. It is complicated. This past year, at school, we had a Sukkah that was also an encampment, which was attacked. Those are Jewish students, but they were advocating for something different.

It depends on the day. Some days, I feel really discouraged to learn more because it is just upsetting. Then I know I am very encouraged to continue learning and growing. From whom? Great question. One of the things that I really appreciated about organizing with JVP is how much communication they do with Palestinians on the ground. I see what is happening in our organizing strategies in the shifts. It is always best to learn from the people who are experiencing and have experience, as long as they are open and willing to share, and it does not feel like a burden to them. There are always books to be read. So that is another great place to learn from, if not the actual people speaking here and now. I do not experience discouragement from myself or other people to learn about the topic.

There has been a significant silencing of the topic in my university. It was shocking for me because the institute had presented itself as very open and welcoming, and I had just started studying there. There are many POC (People of Color) professors with intersectional thinking. But then, when it came to this topic, it was very difficult to enter the conversation with the professors. There were moments in class where Palestinian students wanted to refer to the topic to their own experiences and were shut down. Then the protest occurred, and the statement was made. We saw the professors who signed the statement. They also knew who the people organizing were, because part of our organizing involved facilitating conversations with the professors. So we did not hide. It was very frustrating, sad, and weird to see them sign this paper without being able to hold a conversation with us. The whole paper statement condemned what we have been doing, but they could have chosen to talk to us.

Within, we also found allied professors and attempted to create events where we invited mediators to discuss it. Our need to create learning spaces was hindered by the professors' worries of not having the tools to talk about it, and how to hold the space for multiple traumatic experiences. Palestinians did not want to participate in this format. It was more a format for

allies and Germans, which was not our aim, but was kind of what the professors pushed for. But then, very quickly, we created our own spaces. We made a reading group at the university, which is still ongoing. There, we read texts, had film screenings and discussions, where we educated ourselves about what we actually wanted the university to educate us.

Perhaps they tried to discourage us, but I felt even more motivated to take action. When it comes to resources and all that, they are getting paid for doing their job, and they are not doing it, so we are doing it for free. Still, many people experience the aftermath of this exhaustion, such as burnout. So maybe the discouragement is having its effect. But more on an emotional level, rather than the intellectual level.

I am in a bubble that rather encourages it. Sometimes, of course, there are these instances where I feel like it affects me emotionally a lot, and then I have to be distant for a week or so, and I cannot engage with it. But I found that, mostly, it is not so helpful not to engage with it. Building and finding a community to gain knowledge and engage with this topic feels much more healing when done with others than simply not engaging with the topic at all and not educating oneself further. I find it more helpful to cope with the circumstances these days. An art university might differ in terms of engagement with the topic, as everything is based on dialogue to a greater extent. When you go to other universities, they most likely have lectures, but they are often run-down. Although we have lectures as well, there may be no space available for this topic.

Otherwise, some teachers engage with this topic in different ways that are more hidden. Also, teachers who come from a different background than a white European or a white American or something like this often bring some more critical thought into it, or at least would not silence talking about it. However, it is currently changing slightly; other teachers are revisiting the topic more. It is handled a bit differently because of the man-made famine and mass starvation of Gazans. At the same time, I can choose my seminars and select my teachers.

If there were a safe space where the people came from a mature place and a safe place, and did not have an agenda to get me harmed, I would want to have conversations with Muslims and Palestinians to strategize for peace and understanding. But I also do not have the mental and emotional capacity to do it. Because of that, the people who often could do that outreach are privileged people, like white Americans, let alone white Jewish Americans. Then they become the face of this binary of brown people versus white people, and then turn the area further into a racial divide. They do not see other people who look like them to have these conversations. I tried, there is so much organizing I like to do, but if you do not have people backing you and putting money in you, how are you supposed to do it?

There is a Mizrahi lefty caucus that is very pro-Palestinian that does once a year in Mamona with JFREJ (Jews for Racial and Economic Justice). It is a very lefty Jewish organizing space, and they do an interfaith event once a year of Arab culture called with Mamona, the Muslim Jewish holiday. But outside of that, they do not do other events to connect. Then I said, why do not we do an arts and music festival in Brooklyn, where both populations live, Mizrahi and Muslim communities, and fundraise for issues in Gaza. Immediately, people were like, I do not have the capacity and I am like, you are always talking about this. You want to do something, but you do not have the capacity to make something fun. So, there are a lot of trending politics where, only if you have 50,000 followers and \$100,000 in your bank, people will listen to you. It should be bullshit when I have done the work, and people still do not want to listen. So, I am not successful in doing bigger things because I do not have the means. But I try to do my little part in my little world, but that is even more difficult and stressful.

## **Solidarity in practice**

### **What does solidarity mean to you?**

To be there for one another, to be human beings, to take care of each other from a place of shared values, to be open, and to make compromises for others. It cannot be entirely objective and has ties to a particular perspective; thus, it can be both good and bad.

Obviously, solidarity is broad and can take many forms and expressions. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, what comes to mind is speaking up and acting, using your means to change the current situation. Because it is so broad, the means can be various things, so I cannot pinpoint what solidarity is doing specifically. However, I view solidarity as an action; as long as solidarity is merely an understanding, agreement, or interest, it remains theoretical. It is not to blame people who are not taking action (like protesting, speaking up, or petitioning) to politically pressure and effect change. Often, people confuse solidarity with charity, such as donating money to Palestinian families in Gaza or supporting NGOs. I think it is essential to distinguish between the two. I think that while charity relieves the symptoms of injustice, it can not replace political action, which aims to resolve the root causes. Still, both are needed.

I think of it a lot in terms of willingness for empathy and working toward understanding and common ground. I think fundamentally I am a Jew. Jews just fundamentally disagree. That is not how we work. There is a significant emphasis on cancel culture and whether one is considered an ally or not. It prevents many people from being willing to learn new things. Because they assume that anything that does not align with them is a lie, this is somewhat unrelated, but I have had people say, 'You cannot read the Times of Israel.' It does not matter if they are talking about Israel or not, because they are an Israeli publication and therefore cannot be trusted. I have had people say, you obviously can not read Al Jazeera, because it is a publication that does not like the Jews at all, therefore nothing that they say is true. But neither

of those things is really true. Part of being informed in the media is reading a variety of media and determining what is true and what is not. But there is such an assumption that any publication not written exclusively with your interests in mind cannot be valid.

I wanted to see the official definition of solidarity and how I could incorporate it into my wording. However, I am unsure of the current level of unity. It requires a lot more humility and a willingness to understand where people may not have the whole story that I do not think we are at, at least in the US.

Solidarity means learning and understanding the experiences of other people and simultaneously being able to share my experience of being an anti-zionist, Jewish, queer person. Then, we work for one another, show up when we need others, and know they will show up for us. Because we are entwined, we all want the same thing; ultimately, we want to be safe, to feel liberated, and alive. Enjoy this beautiful, beautiful earth and everything she offers. We can achieve that if we do it together. We do not say that the only way I can get it is if other people do not; that is not true.

I was recently at a talk, and actually, there was also this question; the way the panelists answered was with conflict, which I really appreciated. Like, that solidarity needs conflict. I have not tried to define it for myself. For me, it means empathy and comradeship, like fighting together for liberation from various struggles and positions. Also being empathetic, but not just empathy, more. Solidarity is an action for me. That is fighting together. It also comes with care and love, building hope and community.

It is a question of who deserves our solidarity in some way. Also in the book I was mentioning, they argue that we cannot exclude the vast majority of Jewish people from our solidarity just because they do not fully agree on anti-Zionism, for example. That was one thing I learned. Jewish people in Germany deserve my solidarity whatsoever because Germany perpetrated the Holocaust. My solidarity should not rely on this one political opinion. Even though we might agree on so many other topics like feminism and queer rights, it is a learning experience, and it is difficult to be in solidarity with people that you do not agree with politically. Solidarity and allyship are practices that I am also learning and reflecting on more, with whom to fight, and which fights. There are also tensions in the Palestinian movement with Syrians over Assad. Some people from older Palestinian generations had the whole idea of the axis of resistance, which Assad was part of, like enabling Hezbollah, Palestine, and Iran to create a material route. But then, of course, for Syrian people, it is very screwed up to hear someone legitimizing their dictator in any way. There were tensions surrounding it, and a cancellation was also in the works. This way of dealing with conflict by canceling is not what solidarity means to me. I think maybe when it comes to Palestine, I can fight with these allies, but when it comes to this topic,

maybe these are not my allies. However, it is still possible to find common ground and areas of disagreement.

It holds much meaning for me, from wearing a little symbol or something similar. I had instances when I was traveling within Germany and outside of Berlin. Obviously, you do not see many symbols, but then people see what I am wearing, whether it is a keffiyeh, a t-shirt, or a watermelon, and they realize what it means. This one-to-one interaction with a stranger naturally generates solidarity. Because those who know, they know, it exposes you.

Solidarity is in other acts like standing up for someone who faces a discriminatory, racist act; obviously, not only on this issue. So, you help this person right away or interfere, which I think can also sometimes be dangerous. I know of a friend of a friend who got stabbed because he was going in between. It can also be caring for. However, I believe that the more people who are actively involved in those situations, the less likely it is for something extreme like this to happen.

It does not scare me from verbally standing up for something. I had these situations where Germans were saying, go back to your country or something like that, and this has become kind of normalized, or it is being normalized. I found it awful that no one says anything. That is the very minimum someone can do. Solidarity can also involve hosting specific events, sharing knowledge, and fostering a community, including various demonstrations and gatherings. It can also be seen in the acts where I spend my money and how I distribute it. Which restaurant do I go to, and where do I buy my coffee.

It is a hard question because I do not have a full answer, as it is not something I have fully experienced. Sometimes we get these questions about an ideal state of solidarity, liberation, or justice. None of us has truly experienced that fully. If we are marginalized, we can truly say this is what it is. I can aim for it, but for now, solidarity is empathy. It is mutual aid. It is kindred connections, feeding people, caring for people, and checking up on people. I am speaking for myself, needing it as well. Standing up and speaking for people when they cannot. I think about something so small, but there is a gallery I work at, and there are people who butcher my name and try to misgender me constantly. One of the staff members repeated again and again, "This is their name and this is what they go by." That saved me emotional labor.

I am very, very angry and annoyed. There are many Jews who are involved in organizing, but there are so many Jews in America who have so much privilege. They just want to be entertained by the religion and at the party washing. Party washing is a new word I am creating, if it has not been created, where they fantasize about Israel as one big party town. This is the education I grew up with. But they do not actually care about the conflict and anything that is considered a problem in Israeli society, not even in Palestinian society; they think these are just

lefties and haters. If you love something, you are willing to fix the house. If you love something, you should protect it. If you love something, you should want to strive for it to be better. There is this culture of American Jews that their relationship with their Jewish identity is through Israeli pop culture and parties. I see it in New York all the time. I just got a flyer for it yesterday, and I denied it. Parties, food, so on and so forth. They think they are becoming Jewish by doing these really secular things.

The point is that solidarity is not just being friendly to me in a party room. But when I am suffering, and I am talking about anger and I am talking about pain and I am talking about fear and I am talking about real-life obstacles that are harming me, that you are still willing to support me through it all. I have seen people who are like I want to be friendly to this minority, so I could feel good about myself, and feel diverse. But the moment that you show that you have, on their end, a bitter side, a hard side, they avoid you and toss you away like tossed goods. And that is not solidarity. You cannot claim to speak for a people in a company, but not hire them into leadership. This whole world is filled with virtue signaling, and it is hard to decipher who is coming from a good place and who is marketing themselves so they can profit in this moment.

Similarly, there was a very big white Jewish demonstration in New York City about something related to Israel and Palestine. There were no people of color speaking up. They make their own organizations. There are several organizations that I mentioned before. They make money from it, and they get all these people who are concerned to give money to certain agendas and create jobs, leadership, and books, and literally erase Jews of color in the conversation and other people who are at the intersection. Israeli media, with all of its influence, still keeps winning awards in all these international competitions. I would say the majority of them, 99.5%, because there might be a little gap there. Only white faces are shown in their representation of Israeli society. I feel that Israel is still trying to convince the Western white world that we are just like you, so support us. But then they also double down when people are accusing Israel of being a white ethnostate. They react like no, no, no, no, no. We have black and brown people. Here they are. But you never give them a platform outside of the small Israeli media, internally. They do not show the world the diversity of Israeli Palestinian.

People just see it as the brown is over here and the white is over here. There is a big mix. Because people are in caveman mentalities, even in New York, where they live in their bubbles, and they have not broken out of it. I have always been a person of diversity. People do not have the tools to communicate. Israeli society is so abrasive. It was heterogeneous in the past. It keeps becoming more heterogeneous with Sudanese immigrants, Filipino immigrants, Druze, and Jews from the diaspora. There needs to be an organization that finds a way to break the ice between them. I thought I was going to do that work through applied theater. I went for a master's, but after October 7th, our small cohort got so broken down about it that one-third of

the student population that was Jewish left. Because they felt targeted. I was the only one that they knew who had ties to the region, and I was harassed by someone who was anti-Zionist. Because again, he thought in his mind, if I am anything closely related, I am the problem. I did not talk about my politics. I kept quiet. I allowed him to speak, but to the point that I allowed him to stomp over me, and it broke my mental health so much. He threatened me physically that I would drop out of the program. The whole point of applied theater is tools for de-escalation through playful, intentional theater. But I just feel that the way it was being done was not addressing a lot of oppression that many of us were experiencing. So I tried to do the right thing. It does not mean that people will always see you as righteous.

- **Values that underlie solidarity**

Caring, generosity, kindness, empathy, helpfulness, listening, open-mindedness, thinking outside the box, and selflessness.

Empathy, mutual understanding, and open-mindedness to acknowledge the other.

Compassion, communication, respect, empathy, and a willingness to admit when someone does not know something.

Respect and humility. A huge part of solidarity, and I know I mentioned this earlier, is spending the time to work through your own shit and trauma. Whether it is the trauma of your lifetime or the trauma of a past lifetime. But like actually doing the work to understand where that came from and unlearning it, so that when you are doing solidarity work, it does not spill out onto other people as baggage. Which, inevitably, might happen in moments of high emotion and tension. But still actively doing the work of the self.

For me, it comes down to human rights: everyone has the right to live, move, and be whoever they want to be, without being discriminated against based on their identity, religion, ethnicity, skin color, gender, or body. Whoever is not, deserves my solidarity. This is also maybe where the intersection comes from. Like, I can maybe criticize or have a conversation with Jewish Zionists, but then, for other reasons like antisemitism in Germany, they still deserve my solidarity. Same with Palestinians, where on some things I can agree and others do not. But when it comes to Palestine, they deserve my unconditional solidarity. A solidarity that does not have conditions. For instance, being a feminist. So, really thinking about this intersectionalism, but then practicing it in a way that can hold space for contradictions and several struggles together.

Standing up for someone, caring for and loving each other regardless of who you are, gaining knowledge by educating oneself, not spreading misinformation throughout the world, and not looking away.

## How does the theme of solidarity show up in your own life?

(What would you be willing to do in the name of solidarity, and how have you been practicing it?)

I support things I believe in, ranging from conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, sharing one's opinions on social media, reading about it and trying to understand the topic. Another way I practice it is by donating to organizations I believe in; for example, I have donated some money to Greenpeace (sustainability) and other non-profit organizations. Investing time in protesting, changing the schedule to participate in a bigger cause one believes in. If that topic is urgent and essential, there are no limits. It will be relevant to every aspect of your life, from how your day looks to what I think about before I go to sleep.

I have yet to take significant actions, but I feel like it is so easy to get pulled into it. There are people whose lives are surrounded by it, by its community. I am currently devoted to my studies but do not have the time to invest in them. I need to care for myself and my future before contributing to bigger causes. On top of that, being more politically active and expressing your opinion can drive family and friends away. It might trigger fights, opinions, and specific reactions, and I do not always want to deal with that. I prefer to let go of my views to feel aligned with my family. I am not talking about radical political actions, but even those within the political consensus, like hostages. My family is really concerned about physical safety in protests, specifically because of the mass of people and police violence.

I will try as much as I can to take the time to act, specifically by organizing events like film screenings, talks, and protests, even if I am not attending them. I try to distinguish between what I do for political influence and what I do for myself and the community, which sometimes overlap. The left scene (not specifically related to Israel/Palestine) often blends the two. Between what is to remain in one's bubble and what actually constitutes political influence and change. I sign every petition I can, although I do not fully believe in their power. With that, I hope that the growing German anti-militarism movement and its political aspect can take the forums of civil disobedience. It is one of the only ways to change the situation right now. I also think that the connection and cooperation between workers' struggles is crucial. It was present at the Rheinmetall Disarmament camp, which targeted Rheinmetall, the biggest arms producer in Germany, and is one of the biggest arms suppliers to Israel. At the camp, there was a practical solidarity attempt to block an ammunition factory, but it was sadly not very successful, as there were not so many people.

Having some of those conversations, both in terms of someone educating and someone being educated. Expanding my knowledge and participating in conversations on campus in larger groups. As well as being more willing to stand by my beliefs. I also work at a Hebrew school, so I am thinking more critically about what lessons I impart to youth. How can I ensure that

they can grapple with a non-clear-cut situation? Fundamentally, what I should be doing is talking to many of my friends from day school, but I am not there yet.

I am 100% on BDS. I am not going to cross the picket line on a bootlicker. Because I work with youth, I can not be arrested in an act of civil disobedience. I get quarried, a background check in the US for working with youth as an educator. The work that I do in organizing has to be tailored to that. So I do a lot of data background work and jail support. I am not the one getting arrested, but I support those people getting arrested. So I am definitely willing to do that, to divest.

Outside of Israel/Palestine, I think about how I spend my money, what technology I use, and what businesses I patronize. There is no way to disentangle myself from all of the empire's bullshit completely. My money is small, so I do not know how much of a difference it makes, but I will still try to make it. For example, I canceled my Spotify subscription when it came out that the CEO had invested a hundred million dollars into military AI. I decided to leave and just pay artists directly. Again, I am a tiny drop in the bucket; people will keep using Spotify, which is fine.

In terms of the earth, I am an organic farmer and an outdoor educator, and a lot of that has to do with repairing our relationship to the earth through the way that we take care of her and abuse her so much. That could come from trying not to consume as much, which is hard because I love things. Training myself to be better about whether I actually need this. If it is something I need, can I get it in a better way, maybe. But above all, spending intentional time getting to know and building a relationship with the land I live on. Renewing the ability to hear the land, what she wants, what she needs, and what she thinks. Which ultimately helps me slow down every other aspect of my life.

What I would like to do more of is unite all these struggles. That is also what I have been thinking. I feel the urge to be more mobilized in a less specific collective. Palestine (solidarity) Student collectives have been very important and are pushing a lot in German discourse. We also created a structure for many students to get organized, which is great. I consider it a significant achievement. But then it is limited to where, how, and with whom we operate. My wish is to be part of a movement or collective that addresses multiple struggles and has the space to work on them from a broader and more diverse perspective. This also applies to different age groups and generations. We lack different resources because we are students, and we all depend on our education. We are not all financially secure. Many of us have a visa, and some have a vulnerable visa status. This situation is precarious for students, as they lack a stable job and rely on state funding. We collaborate with other groups, to obtain resources from various sources, and share our privileges as students, such as access to spaces, despite them being frequently more surveilled and restricted. But let us say we have them and access to technology like speakers and similar things. We have places where we can borrow them. Many

peers can be educated through this, which is also a good way to engage in activism, as we share our everyday space. It is a good way to raise awareness, I would say. One wish for me would be to find a more sustainable and inclusive way of activism that encompasses Palestine solidarity and many other forms of solidarity.

I attend demos, educate myself and others, and participate in and support fundraisers. Being active in the student movement. I am still politically active in other contexts. I found it nice to see that the student collective has new members at the university, and it is happening naturally, which is great to see. On the issue of Israel-Palestine, it is still ongoing, and the genocide has been happening for two years. However, it has been ongoing for 75 years. So it will not be over just like that. The movement needs a longer breath on this, and it has to be long-lasting.

I will tell you what I am not going to do. I am not going to risk my life for solidarity. The reason I see this is that some noble people do it. I have not seen anyone do that for me. If you are asking me to risk something like my life, my health, and my safety, and you are not doing shit, I had a friend who told me you do not owe the left your oppression. You do not owe anyone your labor unless you are forced to because of a job. So I am not putting myself at risk anymore because I cannot deal with that trauma.

I like creating third spaces where we do not think about the things that are harming us. I work with the ex-Orthodox Jewish population. I get grants to host events for people who do not observe the holidays or are not welcome anymore in their former synagogues, but they want a space to hang out and think about other things. I like to use art as a means of therapy to redirect people towards a healthy orientation.

But part of me from all this conversation is in trauma mode. At first, when I heard that question, I felt I was in a corner. Because I thought there was an expected answer to what I was supposed to say. At the same time, I did not want to be pinned to the wall. Part of me is like, I am tired, I am hurt, I am traumatized. I have seen so much failed solidarity. Even in New York, one community says, we need people to stand with us, and then they do not do shit to help. I think a perfect example is the Orthodox Jewish community within the wider Jewish community. I am not talking about Jews of color and marginalized people who are down with it. But white, Jewish, liberal, even conservative, who are class privileged, say stand with us against antisemitism, and they do not show up for Black justice, and they do not show up for other issues. It pisses me off. I am a big believer in intersectionality. But intersectionality also means I could come to you about something we agree on that will support and benefit us. People also use intersectionality to push other hidden agendas that are controversial, polarizing, and harmful.

I remember going to Grand Central Station, and it was a protest about the lack of accessibility in transit and nothing to do with Israel-Palestine. There was someone who came with an Israel/Palestine sign that was obviously more on the BDS side. I was annoyed because hundreds of people were running by and only had a few seconds to get their attention, and if you send them too many mixed messages, they do not know the cause. We are here for one main thing; if you want to talk about Palestine, that is another time. It is this something to do with the transit and Palestine, no, so why are we bringing it into the conversation. I felt it was very distracting.

I need to step back because people like me do not organize out of ego. We organize because it is necessary, whether for housing justice or anything. Because our lives are on the line. Every movement often has marginalized people who are forced to.

I remember years ago, I was in a shelter. I literally just landed in a shelter for LGBTQ+ youth in a very unsafe neighborhood in the Bronx. I get a call from someone I have not heard from. She is telling me at the last minute, at midnight, that in five hours, there is a bus to Albany to fight for trans rights, and she is blaming me for not being on the bus. I was like, I do not have food. I do not have a bed. I am suffering. She was making it seem "well, what are you doing for our community?" It goes back to the point that just because I share an identity does not mean I am forced to do everything that you say. That often benefits only certain people. Even the trans community has a hierarchy of leaders that they have created, and they get into fights all the time. That is why so much drama and fighting is unnecessary in the ballroom scene. People fight with each other and are not enemies of each other when the people in power laugh.

They just do it to uplift their careers and their stature. They are not really interested in justice for all. They are only interested in justice for themselves. So I have been used, abused, and expendable. I am still naive because I want to make myself connected. There was a woman who did like black domestic violence work, and she has been ghosting me for years. She said she would speak to me two weeks ago when we had a scheduled time, and she never showed up. Now my phone does not go through if it is not blocked. Every time I text, she says I am with my son, and it is like four o'clock, and her son has not come home yet. I do not know what to believe. I was like trying to say, I want to work with you, I want to help, because that is who I am.

I think it is also part of me needing to do a better job of not people pleasing. It is hard to tell my mind because I have been taught my whole life to put others' needs before my own. And look at where I am. I am way below the federal poverty line. I am having physical, economic, and other forms of instability. All these people that I have helped, I have been an organizer for a long time. Where are they to call me in the middle of the night when I am suffering? Where are

they to send me money when I am suffering? Where are they to get me a job? Where are they to protect me from organizations that have targeted me? Nowhere. Someone told me recently, as we were trying to create a community space for workers' rights, that people are too lazy to build something; they want you to build it for them, and then they will join. What I took it as is that a lot of people do not want to do the work; they want other people to do the work. And for whatever reason, they expect people like me with barely any power to do it. When I cannot do it, again, the people who profit are white, able-bodied men that we see in the world, people with power. Then they become the faces of change when the people who have done the change are grassroots, dark skin, poor, and they never get the humanization they need in wider society. So that has been my lived experience. It is slowly changing. I do not know necessarily for the good because we live in an ultra-capitalist society, and everything is tied to money, and that influences a lot.

I saw a documentary about the Jewish student perspective on the encampments. Then, I saw the following week the Arab anti-Zionist perspective on the encampments. Both were portraying themselves as victims. The thing that they both had in common was that they talked about the universities being passive. The anti-Zionist camp clearly showed how money was tied to influence that. For example, one of their board members at Columbia University is a weapons manufacturer that sends millions of dollars to Israel every year. That blew my mind. The fact that that issue was so divisive, they felt threatened that if you do not shut down the encampments, we are gonna strip funding, just like Trump is doing.

It will force many people to either be more closeted around this injustice, or it will force people to be more aggressive about it, because of the censorship we are experiencing in real time. I think everyone in common is scared. Everyone is scared of not saying the right thing. Everyone is scared to speak up. Everyone is scared of being closeted and suffering about it. Then those people who become so closeted often end up becoming trolls online. They radicalize their thoughts and then target people from where they could hide in the distance and fight their community, as people like QAnon. Then, they do not have civil conversations when they meet.

I cannot even tell you. You wake up, you are a human being. You are tired. You just want to go about the world safely, naively. How many people a day look at me with hate, with anger, with disgust, with fear that I have internalized that I am less than human because they are so scared even to sit next to me and to associate with me. That is because they have created a story in their head that I am less than human. This is what is happening in real time around Jews, Muslims, Palestinians, Israelis, and the wider world, which is creating false narratives that are putting up more walls that are already in place to segregate people towards peace. That is my theory. Sometimes people are like, well, how could you make that theory? Like you are not an academic. And I am like, and what is an academic? They observe life experiences and make

their own theories based on them. Artists are academics because we constantly make theories about the wider world.

**Can you think of any examples of solidarity that you consider meaningful or successful?**

I find the protests of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum and the movement against the Israeli judicial reform, specifically the weekly one on Saturday, a good example of solidarity. Although it was created because of the consequences, it is super important and successful in influencing national political decisions. For instance, I first protested when Netanyahu fired Gallant in March 2023. I sense its importance and urgency. Eventually, it did help. Also, when the decision to fire Gallant signaled an escalation in judicial reform, this madness of the decision mobilized the people to protest. The immediate reaction to it was that we must do something about it.

The 'No Borders movement' in Germany. Since there has been a rise in migrants' oppression in Germany in the last few years, I helped and was part of a few groups and movements that act in practical solidarity with migrants who are in the process of being deported or who are in a deportation prison. Those groups usually try to get them a lawyer and a phone so that they can speak with their families, raise money, and generally create publicity around the topic. They are trying to act against the quiet and secret deportation of migrants, which is sadly very common. It is inspiring to see how many times this work has paid off. They managed to keep families together when they were at risk of being torn apart because they got a good lawyer on board, who, via the law, appealed the decision of deportation. Alternatively, at other times, they convinced the pilots not to fly the refugees/migrants. Some courageous individuals are involved in this effort, who, in addition to being part of organizations and advocacy, also take care of the refugees' living conditions, such as finding them apartments.

A lot of what I would see when I was younger and also in a more immediate post-October 7th world is seeing Jewish Israelis and Palestinians speaking in discourse together and talking about their own lived experiences. I think it provides an interesting perspective. Knowing what I know now, I am even more curious about what it is like for Palestinians to engage in dialogue with someone who has had such a vastly different experience by virtue of citizenship.

One of my best friends at the time reached out to me on October 7th, before I knew what was happening, because I was not on my phone. I remember thinking about how much empathy she had there, like the places where we all have to come together to mourn and understand. There have been so many people who have been killed. A willingness to grieve and, in that grieving, not discount other people who have lost. Very important people, places, and things. I would say that being willing to step outside your perspective and learn from, as well as listen to, others is the most important. I do not really have any friends for whom the conflict does not come up around whether or not they are Jewish, just because it is such a key part of the

media. It actually reminds me of a conversation I had with my father a long time ago that answered one of the earlier questions. But the places where Israel as a nation is held to more scrutiny than other nations doing similar acts, and what that means as the only Jewish nation, while also acknowledging that what Israel is doing is not safe and should be called out. It is that other nations should also be called out, not that Israel should not be, because no one else is. I think that is an understanding that many people have yet to grasp. They deserve to have that international spotlight and to say what you are doing is not okay, and other nations deserve that, too. It is not that Israel is being unfairly punished, but that other countries are not being punished for similar acts. Then they all deserve scrutiny, and people who advocate for those who are not in power.

At my university, one of our largest advocacy organizations for Palestinian rights is run by Jewish students. They do a lot of the advocacy work on campus, and it is definitely a movement of solidarity. That is very inspiring. Many people are engaging in these conversations. Small organizations in New York are doing similar work in hosting dialogues and speakers and getting people on the ground. There are definitely a lot of Jewish people I see who are accepting and recognizing that what is going on is not right and are doing peace work in the West Bank and Gaza. As Jews, as Americans, and as citizens, we will make sure that things are as protected as they can be, given the circumstances. There are definitely people doing wonderful things.

Personally, I have attended numerous events, rallies, and places. More in New York because it is a city of activism and people sharing their beliefs. I would say that it is probably most often in the context of discussions, rallies, and other places where things are happening. I know people in high school who would sell crafts and pins, donating the proceeds to relief organizations. I do not do anything like that, but I believe in it and am glad they did.

Last year, when JYP and a couple of other organizations in New York shut down an occupied Grand Central Station on a Friday evening during rush hour, they planned together with the ACT UP organization. Act Up is a group that formed during the AIDS crisis in the US to organize for the safety of gay people who were experiencing HIV and AIDS. That moment of solidarity was a partnership with ACT UP and these amazing people who organized a protest back then, where they occupied Grand Central. I was not part of it, but I know that there were meetings with the ACT UP elders to talk about action was, how you did it and how we can replicate it. They helped build this action. We went as far as making banners in the style of the ACT UP occupation. Another really good example is when all of the campus sit-ins were happening, how people from other campus organizations or other organizations in those areas would come and make meals for the people who were occupying campuses. People whose work was not doing stuff around Palestinian solidarity recognized its importance and gave us the resources that they had.

In Berlin, for example, the O-Platz (Oranienplatz) movement is a beautiful example of solidarity. Recently, they had their anniversary. In the 90s, refugees occupied, squatted, and lived in this Platz (square) in Kreuzberg. They marched and came from all over Germany to Berlin. The movement stayed, and every year they do this encampment. It is intergenerational, mostly from the migrant movement, but I believe there have been many allies and newer generations. It is very beautiful because it is just sustained. It had this momentum, but also succeeded in maintaining itself. They undertake many beautiful projects. They really shaped the area and the space. The struggle also extended beyond its initial focus, which remains the rights of refugees and migrants, to include gentrification, homelessness, and feminism.

Activism can have many different forms. I feel like we should go away from this idea of a masculine hero being on the streets in the front line, fighting the police, and getting arrested. To consider other forms of activism as important, such as care work like cooking and cultural work that has been done in the background. Another example is consultation places where people without a house can stay overnight. It is so valuable. If we really want to fight the state and abolish the German state, we need alternative structures that we can rely on. This is even more important with the rise of fascism. We need community. We need structures that enable us to survive without being reliant on the state. The people who create these structures are mostly not those on the front line of the demos and getting arrested. I guess we need both. However, I think there is a slight hierarchy in who receives the credits and who is perceived as more of an activist. It also comes with a certain narrative, which might not allow us to have these conversations about contradictions and different opinions on Palestine, because a certain dominant group talks to the press from the movement, like people who film on Instagram, videos of how they get arrested. However, we do not hear about the people who do the care work in the background.

For example, an anti-racism group or an anti-discrimination group was established at my university in 2020. They have done much work before the collective that originated on October 7th. It laid the groundwork for this. In general, many things have changed since 2020. Sometimes it also makes me feel like no one has learned anything, which is sad. However, at the same time, it laid the groundwork for people to share databases, knowledge, and learn more about racism, discrimination, and the intersectionality of other categories as well. It was an important movement.

I also remembered something I did not mention, which I would like to add: the Jewish Solidarity collective at my university. They had quite an important response to the open letter (the presidents, teachers, and employees signed that). They responded and pointed out various issues, including wrongdoings and inaccurately stated statements in the letter. Out of fear for repression, they did not disclose their names publicly. When they formed the collective, many

people in Germany and other countries had already been canceled for signing certain letters or similar actions. It only made sense for them not to disclose their full names. They still wanted to meet with the president, but he did not want to meet with them until they fully disclosed their identity. Then it was said that it is a psychological threat that they are doing to him, and twisting the narrative. You would think that a president protects all his students.

## **The experience of collectivity – from the personal to the political**

### **Do you see yourself as a part of a collective, and if so, what makes it a "we" and why?**

I see myself as a part of the Israeli collective and its ethos. Since we have been through so many wars and madness, we understand that the people of Israel are the power, and the power comes from the people. The fateful events that we have experienced, especially wars, have forced us into unity. The Israeli collective I am a part of is one that loves its country, that wants it to keep existing and thriving, to bring back the hostages, and that believes in the power of people. Israelis love their nation because they believe in its people's goodness and willingness to help. I want to feel that we will always help one another, for example, if one gets stuck with the car or is without money, this sense of feeling that you are not alone. For instance, when Israelis go abroad and meet other Israelis, it feels familiar and home-like, even though they have never met.

I see myself as connected to the people in 'Israelis for Peace', although I am not as active in the group as I would like to be. This group of people, specifically, of left Israeli Jews living in Berlin, is a certain experience that is complicated at this time. But it is a community I have not had before in Berlin.

My experience since October 7th has been quite isolating. Even my Jewish friends who have similar political leanings to me do not have exactly the same ones. There are definitely larger movements for me to be a part of, and I think I am still figuring out where I fall.

Yes, I have a couple of communities. I would say a good chunk of them are around the Jewish community. For most of the communities I am in, it makes it a community because we hold similar values. They are not all the same. Like my community in Vermont, where I used to live, it is a communal living or co-housing. We shared values of relationship with the earth and spirituality; these are significant values in our lives that brought us together because we care about those things and want to live them. There are other communities like my friends here in Boston. It is my community because I know someone and have met all my friends. Shortly afterward, I made more friends. I am not so sure exactly how it becomes like a community. We definitely share a lot of values. I mean, we are all leftists. So the thing that brings us together is shared values.

I am not super involved in the JVP in Boston because I moved here a year ago and am still settling in. So I do not have an organizing community in Boston yet. I am still connected with my New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire chapters. When I was in those places, that definitely felt like community. Different than what I have with just my friends, something that really brings people together beyond values, like having a mission, a commitment, a project. So with organizing, we have the same values, but we are doing something with those values. We are actively showing up, meeting, and doing actions like celebrating Jewish holidays through the lens of Palestinian liberation. We are really doing something. In the same way, my community in Vermont, where I lived for a year, was also an educational nonprofit. So throughout the year, we hosted school and community groups for significant seasonal moments to share and teach. That is a step beyond just having shared values and thinking about them.

I identify myself in where I feel most safe in Berlin, which is the post-migrant, anti-colonial, queer feminist community. This is how I would identify my political values and stances. What makes me feel belong to it is our shared experience of discrimination and allyship, and the will to fight against this discrimination. I suppose it is also a matter of willingness to create a community. Additionally, my living situation, being part of a community, and our shared values are essential in creating these spaces where we can take care of one another. Care is essential in understanding the collective and community. Really caring for each other, not just politically, but also personally.

Right now, no. I have more of a community, less of a collective. I am not part of a collective at this time. My community is organizing itself. I have a digital group that we communicate through with many friends, and sometimes we organize ourselves for demonstrations. Or if someone seeks juristic help because people face police violence. We stay in touch, exchange knowledge, and organize ourselves using this channel. Over the past two years, through the student collective, I have connected with various individuals with whom I sometimes organize, participate in, and attend fundraisers, craft items, sell them, and then donate the proceeds. Through friends from different bubbles, I am also staying connected to different groups and collectives, which is quite nice.

Yes and no. We all naturally look for communities that are like us to feel safe. But the queer community kind of feels forced into each other. It is similar to other identities that you do not necessarily choose, but you are forced into because of oppression. But the queer community and the trans community specifically have so much oppression to unpack. They end up throwing it at each other and hating each other freely. I hate that about queer culture, where some random person thinks that it is okay just to call you bitch or faggot or tranny because it is normalized in their culture to name each other. They are like, hey girl. They think that is a way,

and they think they are being playful. But if you are a stranger and I do not know you and you are calling me names, I am offended, even if you are similar to me.

I am part of many minority groups, but I do not always feel fully welcomed because of hierarchies within different marginalized groups. I tend to steer towards places that have good, healthy community agreements. I do not have the answers to many of these questions because I do not know the ideal space and what peer mentorship looks like. I think it is really important to provide respect, understanding, and accommodations. To not verbally, physically, emotionally, or mentally attack anyone. That is really important because people are very quick to attack people in a lot of spaces I am in, online and offline. I also check in and ensure people's needs are met.

I reminded myself yesterday in a story, I said, just because we are both queer does not mean we are family. Chosen family, I am redefining it for myself, which does not mean people who are exactly like me. To me, a chosen family means people who share my values, respect me, and keep me safe. There are a lot of queer trans people I had to remove from my life. It is hard to set those boundaries because you want to be in solidarity, but there is also a level of oppression that is being extended. Because of queerphobia and the disparities that queer and trans people face, they throw it onto other queer and trans people. As I said before, we are not enemies of each other. The actual enemy is crushing us, and we are doing their dirty work. So I feel that similarly to the Jewish community. I feel that similarly to communities of color. I feel that, definitely, with any Middle Eastern community, it is very one-sided, even though there are small break-offs. I am often a minority in many senses because I do not like hateful communities. Then I am seen as the hater because I disagree with their hateful beliefs. It is very hard to stand on your own. I think about how big my family is and how they have homogeneous thinking. I am the one who is brave enough to break it off, but I am the one who is seen as pathologized because I am the minority.

I try really hard to make my own collectives. For example, I am doing a Shabbat this Friday, where we cook together. I feel really underrepresented in the work of organizing in society, definitely in the Jewish community, and in the wider Israeli society for the work I have done. But I am also afraid that the more public I am, the more representation is needed, the more people will point their fingers and hate. But they hated me when I was in the background and invisible. They are going to hate me when I am visible. We are seeing that in American society as the more trans people are visible, the more there are anti-trans laws, for example. It is scary.

- **If not, what would you need, or what do collectives need in general?**

More logistics are involved in figuring out how to get involved and when. Because of the state of the world, a lot of these spaces and this activism are kept pretty quiet so that people cannot be harmed or caught and punished. So there is a level to which it is just logistically a little hard

to get involved because people are being really quiet by design. Then there is also a level of figuring out which policies I believe in, which spaces speak most to me, and coming to terms with the fact that as I become more vocal in my beliefs, knowing and being comfortable with losing friends and affiliations with certain places that I have known and loved for years and just sort of being willing to let that happen, which I am trying to develop.

When thinking about where to get involved, it is mostly about the goal and to what extent I believe in the mediums being used. My family will donate to relief organizations, which is very different from a protest. When does it make sense to protest, how does that work, and how does one make that a priority. I would not say there is a particular list of institutional rules that I look for. I am not, at this point, a particularly observant or religious Jew, but there are also places within the advocacy network within which there is a very particular expectation of what Judaism should look like. So it can also be hard to hold the nuance of observant practice in the context of some of the larger organizations.

I guess I would need something like an affirmation. For example, if I knew we were connected or something like that. It is a kind of affirmation that one is not using it against me as a weapon.

**What could a “we” made up of you and your peer (who holds a different opinion) look like?**

I will need to get to know them personally first to feel comfortable and safe in a political context that would look like agreements on certain things, like the right for Israel to exist and keep existing. If they had agreed with me, it means there is an agreement of my right to exist. Explicitly referring to Arabs and Palestinians, acknowledging Israel's right to exist will make me feel secure, like they do not want to kill me. I find it hard to believe that they can refuse to acknowledge Israel and, at the same time, not want to hurt me. Alternatively, if not physically hurting me, so kicking me out makes me go away, just generally it means to me that they do not want me here. However, if an Israeli disagrees with the existence of Israel, I will feel differently. I will be more open-minded since we share a common ground. I know that the disagreement on it comes from a different perspective. Moreover, if we disagree, I find it helpful that people will learn history; that might be able to foster a mutual understanding, the history of both Israelis and Palestinians. I do know my history, but I do not know Palestinians' history from their perspective. I acknowledge that it will be difficult to understand their history fully. Nevertheless, understanding where each person comes from will make me feel more comfortable. I believe that one's identity definitely shapes one's experience and worldview.

On top of that, it should be clear that Israel is a Jewish state, and in practice, it can mean Hebrew as the primary language, and so on. At the end of the day, that is what we fight for: a safe state for all Jews. If the country changes its ways, then what is its point?

On a more humanist level, humor and sharing each other's culture can help us connect more. For example, holidays, beautiful known quotes, and great food. To bond first before starting to engage with complex topics. If that worked, it would give me the sense that we are together and here to learn and get to know each other.

It sounds extreme, but I think that having security will make me feel safer, especially when engaging with people who come from different backgrounds in Israel/Palestine.

It connects to what I said previously about having common ground and goals, regardless of whether the person is German, Palestinian, Israeli, or from any other background. If you want a better vision, peace in one way or another, whether in one or two states, and if we agree on intermediate goals like ending the war, stopping the genocide, and stopping Germany from sending arms. It is essential to identify the minimal, agreed-upon common ground through which one can form a movement or a "we". In Israel, for instance, there was an urgency to end the occupation; as a consensus within the movement, not necessarily related to other opinions that group members might hold. Right now, in Germany, specifically, it is to stop arming Israel. Generally, it is something that a movement should learn to do, finding a clear, shared goal instead of having multiple objectives that everyone must agree with to join the group/collective. In the 'No Borders Movement', for example, the common ground was that refugees are welcome.

It would require a great deal of willingness to engage in dialogue. It would require much learning and be quite challenging. I have to believe that it is possible because if it is not, then I cannot see how we are going to progress as a society and as a religion that is an identity and a culture and part of the statehood. I have to believe that we can have these conversations one day. There is definitely a need for people to be willing to accept when they do not know something. There needs to be a willingness to be wrong, to learn. It needs to be a safe space where people can feel comfortable and ask tough questions.

I think my first reaction goes for anything, which is getting together and sharing food. It is one of the best ways to build community because we have been doing it forever as human beings. We are meant to sit down and share food together. So breaking bread. Spending time on the land is also a nice space of equal ground to be in the place where you are, intentionally. It helps break the ice in a lot of ways.

I believe that it should always be open for other people. However, what is needed from the people is responsibility and accountability. I am open to people making mistakes, but only if I know that this person is willing to be accountable and receptive to criticism. That comes to my mind. That also counts for people within the community. When we criticize each other, people often feel excluded, shut down, or even canceled, which is not the intended purpose of criticism. It can also be an act of care and solidarity. To say I see it differently or I feel this is

problematic. It does not mean that you should not be here. But I also feel that many times in marginalized communities that are dealing with trauma, this can be a moment of rejection and people not feeling welcome because of certain behaviors of others. I wish there were more accountability and a greater willingness to resolve conflicts rather than running away or shutting others down.

### **What can we provide each other to ensure a safe space?**

- **What would you need?**

A promise to refuse violence and not attack each other, but to respect and listen, I do not want to feel attacked, to feel like I am fighting for my opinion, my life. I want to think that it is a safe space. On top of that, they should practice open-mindedness, not predetermined thoughts, but be curious, without filters. Each person should be for themselves, open to others, open to share and accept whatever comes, disregarding the nature of proving yourself to others, uniting against each other, or carelessly following others' opinions.

Openness to nuance in layered conversations. For example, the event hosted by the Diaspora Alliance, in collaboration with 'Israelis for Peace', Jewish Voice, and other organizations from this ecosystem. Personally, I felt that it was a safer space to discuss topics because there was a clear consensus and shared experiences on specific issues. While having common experiences is not a must, it does help when discussing complex topics like antisemitism, racism, anti-classism, or similar things. There is less need to worry about explaining the experience because it is valid in itself, as many people have experienced it or know someone who has. That I find super helpful. The ground truth I need to have an honest conversation with a person is the consensus of equal human rights for all.

Regarding civil rights, such as freedom of movement, religion, and gender, every solution or belief discussed should be rooted in the human and civil rights that we aspire to, without compromise. That seems to me like something that sounds very simple, but in its practicality, it is not apparent. Whether it involves gender equality or freedom of movement, it can clash with other considerations, such as the need for two separate, determined states.

There is not a whole lot of safety. There is not a whole lot of compassion. It is a matter of whether you are with us or against us. That creates echo chambers of people who will only listen to others who share the same beliefs as them. I see so many people who are denying the starvation that's currently going on or justifying it. Anyone justifying the starvation of children, that is not part of what it means to be in a community, that is not what it means to think critically about the conflict. I do not see how you can do anything good based on that.

In some ways, I think a safe space is a little overplayed because if we have a completely safe space, we will never be challenged with other views or ideas, which is an awful existence to consider. A safe space where you can also learn and grow comes from creating trust between

people, which could happen in whatever way one wants to create trust. Determining the values in the room, for example, sometimes when I teach workshops, we create communal agreements together. This means we voice, write down, and revisit the values that are important to you when you show up in a space and make sure that they are agreed upon. So that when people show up in a space, they can feel comfortable and confident about what to expect. But the thing about creating a safe community is that the container is just a container. It is temporary because at some point, you have to leave the container and go back out. So it is really good to have that safe space and develop it by naming values, agreeing on what you do, and how you respond when the values are not followed. Also important because sometimes people mess up, and sometimes people say or do things that are bad in the community. You have to be able to respond to that. A really good and strong community creates a comfortable transition to leave. Whether it is temporary, like going on a trip or something similar, or if someone chooses not to be part of that community anymore, that should be okay. It is important to be able to support people in doing that movement.

A safe space is an ideal that we can never fully attain, regardless of the context. The more people are involved, the less safe the space; we cannot control it.

- **What would you agree to embody for others' needs?**

It is a relevant question because I assume many people do not go to pro-Palestinian protests or collaborate with certain groups, because they did not clearly condemn the massacre on October 7th, with even some groups justifying it. Personally, when talking with people, I think it is a red line. For instance, I will not march with someone who did not acknowledge those as war crimes, or will deny that they happened, or even present it, as some people present what is currently happening in Gaza, as some kind of self-defense. Of course, there are layers to it. I believe that my redlines, when examined closely, reveal that civil society is being directly affected and targeted. Talking about proper Israel, I had conversations with Israelis who talked about transfers to Gazans, which is unfortunately the Israeli mainstream opinion. However, there were also talks with people in the radical left about deporting Israelis who were not anti-zionist. It relates to the other question of equal rights.

There is a lot of Israeli nationalism and a prioritization of Jewish people as being the chosen people, having a right to this land. I think that needs to not be present in these discourses because fundamentally, whether or not you believe in a biblical doctrine, so many people are here. So, to believe that some lives have more value than others, I have many problems with that. So that is sort of my line in the sand, of believing that every life deserves the same care and love. Remembering that we are all just human beings may sound so obvious and clichéd, but many people have forgotten this because they feel so threatened.

Many of the values are similar to those I discussed earlier, around which values are important when having difficult discourse and dialogue. Like respect for one another, knowing when you are taking up too much space or need to step up, and being able to set and maintain your own boundaries. Not assuming everyone understands your perspective or shares the same experience, so trying to speak from the I. For example, I know this, I experienced, that instead of we. Moreover, meeting people where they are at. That was important for me on my journey towards becoming an anti-Zionist. If from day one it had been shoved down my throat and I was harassed or told that everything I know is wrong, that does not make me want to learn. Some people's approach to Zionists or some Zionists' approach to non-Zionists is to go with anger. But instead, what if we went from a place of love and understanding. When we need to rage and complain about stupid people, we can do it within the safety of our close friends.

### **Interpretation of anti-zionism**

When I lived in a community with my friends who referred to themselves as liberal Zionists, I was the first person who ever had meaningful and respectful dialogue with them about Israel, Palestine, and Zionism. This was really important because if you are not given a safe, comfortable way to engage with it, you will get a lot of misinformation. They did not know what being an anti-Zionist meant. So that is my preface to answering this question.

To me, it is a rejection that Israel exists as a Jewish state for our safety. It is a rejection that my Judaism relies upon the existence of Israel in its current form. It is a celebration of diasporic Judaism. I can have a beautiful, full, and valid Jewish experience wherever I am; for me, that right now is in Boston. Meaning that I am going to do Judaism here, and it is going to be really great.

For me, this connects to my anti-Zionism, though. I do not necessarily hear other people always talk about this, the idea of celebrating diasporic Judaism. It is known that all land is holy because our earth is magical. There is actual magic flowing through the land all the time. The reason that we determined a place to be holy is just because we have figured out how to access that magic at a certain time and place. Where I live is the holy land to the indigenous people who lived here, the Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Massachusetts tribes. So if I spend the time getting to know it, it can become holy for me too. From an American anti-Zionist perspective, it is the complete rejection that my money is used to kill people, to target journalists, murder children, and spread lies about people who are simply trying to live. Also, Judaism has existed without the state of Israel for almost all of its existence on this earth.

As well as remove the conflation of that Eretz Israel, the holy land of Israel that is in the Bible, and what we in post-imperialist Western society call Israel. Those are not the same. It is the same land, but they are not the same place. I even love that some anti-Zionist scholars and rabbis have this idea that in the Bible, when they talk about the Holy Land, Eretz Israel, it is not

a real place. It is not a place that you can ever reach. It is a utopia you strive for, which is a really cool way to think about it. Because what if, instead of having an ethno-state for Jews, we just try to build a good world for everyone. That is Eretz Israel, the land of milk and honey.

Setting conditions for belonging is weird for me. That is not how I would approach a community. I would not want to assume people do wrong things. In order to get them involved. But there are things I would not like to do. For example, cancel culture is something I really do not want to participate in. If people and communities tend to handle conflicts that way, and have no space to criticize this, without being called the friend of the abuser or the complicit in the perpetration of something, then this would be something that I would stay away from because it is also something common in Berlin. So, if people ask me to handle conflicts that way, I would say, no, thank you.

There was an instance when our demo was attacked, and we had to chain. I felt safe enough to chain because there were many people at the demo, and many had brought big banners, so we could already shield ourselves more. Not every demo, I would feel safe enough to chain. Chain means to support and not let the police in because they would just basically kidnap people. They also sexually harass people. That is what happened at an international queer demo. There was even a statement from Amnesty International Germany addressing the issue.

## Collective Justice

### How does justice look to you in this political sphere of Israel/Palestine?

I do not see justice in conquering the Gaza Strip; I see in promising security, that October 7th will not happen again. Justice is a security for the citizens. The absolute dream is peace, that both sides can live peacefully, that we will be two normal states. True justice can be a two-state solution; I do not rule it out. However, the two-state solution should make sense to all sides regarding territories. As for now, it does not seem like it will happen. Overall, we should all live our lives without any attacks and deaths. On top of that, the legitimization of antisemitic behaviors.

It is something that evolves throughout time. I assume that the answer I would have given you three years ago is not the one I will say now, following the current event and the genocide in Gaza. The foundation for justice is the acknowledgment of grief and history. Not just the current war crimes, but acknowledging the suffering since the Nakba until nowadays. There is also a mutual acknowledgment that needs to be done. Currently, I am speaking from the Israeli perspective. There is a need for acknowledgment of the horrors and, to the extent possible, reparations. The discussion of returning is another one that falls under the freedom of movement. Currently, the situation in Israel/Palestine manifests in walls and checkpoints, one of the blockades. It is a big question, how do you reparate, but there are historical examples. We need to reach a just solution as fast as possible; for me, that is equal rights from the river to the sea.

On top of that, education or de-education (although it is not a very nice word) of the society to tolerance and acknowledgment of past mistakes. Those are beautiful sentences, but sadly, I have no idea how to reach that. Additionally, it is even more challenging to envision how this vision of tolerance and acknowledgment must manifest in practical actions. Because mere acknowledgment is not enough, it can help in rebuilding Gaza or providing housing to people who have lost everything. I also feel that I am not in a position to dictate everything. Because I lack the perspective of someone who is undergoing what is going on in Gaza. However, the current focus is to stop what is happening right now, and later on, to acknowledge what it means for the other. I cannot dictate justice for everyone. However, every solution that involves the continuation of the conflict in one way or another will not satisfy the desire for justice and will only lead to further bloodshed.

There is the question of Netanyahu and his actions, both his own and those of some of his cabinet members, and what that looks like. That is definitely one conversation. There is also the question of comparing conflicts, assessing their severity, and determining Israel's responsibility in the eyes of the world stage following this.

I recently read the book, 'One Day Everyone Will Have Been Against This' (Omar El Akkad). There is a level at which public society will change, also in its perception of Israel. For instance, much of the German identity at this point is tied to the aftermath of World War II. Obviously, those are very different circumstances, but it is the idea of doing something egregious to another group of human beings. How can you really recover from that?

There will be a lot of mourning and a provision of many more resources. At this point, it largely depends on who can survive and what that entails. As a Jewish person on the other side of the world, I am not sure that I am qualified to have a vision. I visited Israel once, when I was seven years old. So, I am not sure I can speak more broadly about the global dialogue, what it will look like, and what I want it to look like. But I do not know that I can speak to the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, given that I am neither.

Obviously, I agree that everyone should have access to security, basic fundamental human rights, food, shelter, water, and the opportunity to raise a family without fear, if they so choose. To be able to set their own lives and stay in their own homes, without being taken over by settlers. I am unsure if this trust can be rebuilt. I do not really think there was ever a trust to begin with. There is definitely a lot of work to be done in terms of repair.

The first thing I will say is what justice does not look like to me. Justice does not look like putting politicians in jail and calling it a day. That is not justice. Because if the UN put out a warrant for Netanyahu's arrest and some other guy. That is not justice because their being in jail does not dismantle what has been built. I think justice is a complete reimagining of what it means to live for Jews and Palestinians to live in solidarity. I do not think I should have a strong opinion about the one-state versus two-state solution because I do not live and get a vote there. It is not my life to live. The people should make that decision. So justice would be doing a complete reset in the daily imaginations of the people there, so they do not want to kill each other, and letting them decide what is supposed to happen. Like, what if democracies were real, anywhere, justice would be an actual, true democracy where people are not trying to kill each other, or screw each other over, or to make money off of each other. Maybe that is why we need socialism.

People having the same access and rights. It is not the same in the sense that everyone should receive the same, but rather that everyone should receive what they need. Structural injustice does not occur simply because you belong to a particular group or nationality; you are afforded different rights. The structural part is what is important. I do not rely on the state to solve these problems, so I believe it is the task of communities to create spaces where people have access, such as housing, healthcare, education, and culture.

Being heard is also a crucial topic at this time. The possibility of having your story and narrative being heard could solve many problems. Suppose the German media would also allow different narratives to be part of the discussion. I have often heard that Israeli newspapers report differently from the German media. For example, when reading Haaretz and German left-wing newspapers, Haaretz is less Israel-biased. You do not even have this narrative in the German mainstream media. We have this one established left-wing newspaper (taz), which has always been Zionist and did not really shift much. Of course, you have self-published leftists who are covering Palestine more. However, suppose there were more differentiated and balanced coverage of both narratives. In that case, I think this anger, the desire to shut others down, and the big frustration of living in Germany would be at least more justified. This is where much of the hatred and anger come from. It is not just dealing with your people being slaughtered and killed, but also seeing how the state that you live in is portraying them as terrorists or not even counting them as human beings. It would be less painful if there were more access to be heard in the broader and dominant society, which would also be one way to get more justice.

As an apartheid and settler colonial state, Israel does not resemble a democracy, nor does it have the right to exist. This, however, does not mean that the people who are born and live there are denounced. It is important that the land is given back. It would probably take decades to resolve this, but the right to go back for many expelled Palestinians, justice spoken for the people being tortured, for all the complicit soldiers, and people being released from prisons, also holding states like Germany and the US responsible for being complicit in a genocide. Obviously, Gaza will no longer be occupied. We can only hope for, but the state of Israel, especially now, will never be a safe space anyway. Especially now, after all that happened, it is just making up such a highly fascist government.

I do not know what justice looks like because it is an injustice that we are being criminalized by our governments in America or in Israel for speaking out about the war.

### **How can peace advocates come together to fight for a just peace in Israel/Palestine?**

It is hard for me to tell. What first comes to mind is pro-peace protests and showing compassion for both sides. People should say I wish for peace, not that Israel is apartheid. If the common worldview changes, world leaders need to do it. Honestly, I do not feel like I can do anything about it. It is hard for me to believe in peace, let alone express it. I can talk about it with my close circle, but I do not have the power to make it happen. If a leader like Rabin agreed to take the peace mission on himself, I would show my support by talking more and protesting. Right now, the things I am willing to do are to talk about it with people abroad and express that we do want peace. I sincerely believe that most Israelis want peace. But now, it is not widely discussed because of the current situation.

The baseline for collectives like these (activists) to exist is to agree to disagree, which can seem obvious. However, it is important to understand that the collective cannot exist without it. Whether it is to not agree on a solution (on the matter of Israel/Palestine), one state or two-states, or which actions are legitimate or which are not, or what chants to say, and so on. Focusing early on what unites us and what we share is important. In 'Israelis for Peace', for example, this was expressed through the core principles. Those who agree with this are welcome to join and support the movement. It is specifically helpful that it is publicly written and not just an up-in-the-air assumed agreement. Because an assumed agreement can fall apart easily, and one then realizes that a gap exists between opinions, that serves as a ground truth that keeps the collective intact.

I think many of them are trying, which is excellent and necessary. There are reasons that these dialogues exist. We are finding each other because we are all mourning the people who have been lost, as well as the vision we once had of the state. We are still working on processing and admitting to that grief.

There is an amazing musician who has done some really cool projects in the past. He just came out with a book of poetry and prose, Gabriel Meyer Halevi. He has been doing solidarity work for a long time. He does it through music, art, and conversation.

This might be a huge assertion, but I think if we, as a society, treated each other better, had better working conditions, spent less time on screens, talked to each other, went outside, ate food together, and knew each other, a lot of our problems would be solved. I know war has always existed, so maybe my idea is a complete utopian fantasy. But I do think that (eating food together) would help a lot. So turning back to the things that make us human in a happy way, like art, food, love, and being connected to land, is a really good place to start.

It would be better if men were not in charge. At least if men are in charge, they have done the work to recognize their privilege and change and be better. That being said, there are a bunch of women who should not be in charge as well. So it is not just about gender. People who are outside of and recognize patriarchy would be better leaders. It is a big project to commit to and use the tools that exist. It is much harder to choose that way. It is much easier just to take and take and push other people down because that is what they want us to do.

Peace in the context of Israel/Palestine is a bit of a tricky word because I can imagine that for many Israelis, there was peace before October 7th. But for Palestinians, there has not been peace in a very long time. There is also the slogan "no justice, no peace" because justice underlies peace, but not the other way around. You cannot see what happened on October 7th outside of the context of occupation, Nakba, and displaced people who ended up in refugee

camps in Gaza. As long as the occupation and the apartheid are going on, there will not be peace, unfortunately.

I feel everyone is doing what they can. In Germany, we are trying to tackle the German government in order to stop selling arms. There are Israelis inside Israel who are fighting against the occupation and also trying to raise awareness in the society. Some activists protect Palestinians in the West Bank when they do their daily thing. Palestinians have been doing what they can for decades, like educating, fighting for their rights, and fighting for their houses not to be sold or demolished. Everyone should do what they can, within their capacity. For example, I do not speak Hebrew, so it does not make sense to address a broader Israeli society. I feel that this is very much needed because there is racism and propaganda that enable all this to take place, which is something that should be tackled. I think Israelis and non-Israeli Jews have a huge responsibility now, and also power in the discourse. We see it in Germany and the US, for example; they have more rights to speak and more space to be heard, which is very sad and very telling of the power dynamic we are trying to tackle. So I think it is very important that Jewish people speak up, because they also have less to lose, at least than other minorities in Germany. Also, as Germans, we have a responsibility, as the state is misusing the memory culture of the holocaust to justify supporting Israeli war crimes, and sending weapons. We have a responsibility to fight for a just accountability of the Nazi crimes and for justice in Palestine. I try to do what I can within my resources and access. Germany is very complicit. So I focus on that.

I think peace is a very white word and should be called liberation. There cannot be peace if one oppressive state still exists. It has to be liberation. It is a foundational way to look at everything intersectionally, and then you somehow find the ground consensus of what is unjust and how to fight for liberation. It is a difficult question because there are various peace movements. Somehow, there are still Zionists in this peace movement in Israel. Their work remains important because it lays the groundwork for people to educate themselves and avoid fascism. At the same time, it is not enough.

That is a trillion-dollar question that is not going to be solved by me, nor am I going to have the answer. I think you have to think about a lot of these questions and not be as pragmatic as you would like to be. I am so filled with trauma now about other things in my life, including instability, that it is hard for me to even think about a greater trauma elsewhere. So I think trying to preserve ourselves and care for ourselves is really important. Give where we can, support where we can, and inject little acts of goodness.

- **What has been making it difficult?**

If there is a lack of a widely supported leader who fights for peace, then there will be the right conditions. The leader should be influential and powerful, one who can pave the way for it and

hold it against the other politicians. Our nation is tired of fighting, and nobody is standing to back up the effort for peace. Our priorities have changed when voting and supporting a politician or political party, as have the priorities of politicians and parties. Of course, some still think of peace, but I struggle to see them as those who can bring peace. A part of it is also because we no longer believe in peace. Although I support peace, it is hard to believe it is occurring in this reality. I could believe in it if envisioned and spread in the media. If peace were a consensus, I would be a part of it. I prefer feeling one with my nation, and set aside my thoughts and ideas; that is what it means to live in Israel. I do want to be disconnected from living here. If we all believe in it, that will give me the idea that I should support it.

Cancel Culture and the Fear of Speaking Up. There is such an extensive digital footprint everywhere. People all have very different lines of what is and is not acceptable.

It is really expensive to live anywhere. Especially if you want to live in a place like a city, like Boston, where you do not need to drive everywhere and where there are a lot of people and things going on. You have to spend the majority of your life just making enough money. Some people can do it. Some amazing people can work, organize, create, and do all of that and get by. But not everyone can do that. That is hard. Then, if you add in people who have families or chosen family that they have to take care of, that makes it hard. I think about my living situation, where I live communally with four other people. So I only cook dinner once or twice a week because other people in my house cook dinner for me on other nights. That frees up most of my nights to go to events and meet people, work on a project, swim to reset, and organize. But there is so much that we have to do to survive that we are always on, like our bodies are always working, and hopefully we are getting enough sleep. However, most people do not have a safe balance in their lives that allows them to do work that matches their values.

### **What short-term and long-term actions are being taken or should be taken to reach peace?**

To create a peaceful consensus among all, omit terrorist organizations (as much as possible), change Hamas' control in Gaza, provide pro-peace education, make peace a mainstream subject in media through talking about the struggle for peace and goodness through people's actions, and promote trade (will give legitimacy to Palestinians in the Israeli society). That could change public opinion. To make this change in the government, who is in power and what is their opinion; A lot of the time, it is a projection of the nation and its feelings. The government matters, depending on its actions.

The first thing will be Germany having a military embargo on Israel. Another thing is economic sanctions. Like when Russia attacked Ukraine (without comparing those two situations), Europe imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia, something that Europe has not imposed on Israel. However, it has been almost two years since the war began, which is crazy when you

think about it. More specifically, there is a trade agreement between Europe and Israel, which is important to highlight. At the end of the day, Israel is a small country that relies heavily on exports and imports. At times, when it suits its political agenda, Germany will talk about the children in Gaza and human rights. On the other hand, Germany will invite Netanyahu to Germany, unbothered by the Hague's arrest warrant. Also, Germany buys weapons and military measures worth billions of euros from Israel. Just last year,, Germany signed a nearly 4 Billion Euro weapons deal with Israel, the largest Israeli weapons export in history. From a political perspective, showing this hypocrisy and complicity is the pressure that we need.

There needs to be more education. It needs to be more thorough and more thoughtful. People also need to learn to recognize what is true and what is not, what constitutes AI, and what constitutes a certain narrative, as well as learning to obtain their news from multiple sources, understand misinformation, improve education, increase solidarity movements, and provide humanitarian aid. There is a reckoning to be had within Jewish institutions more broadly.

Many of the campaigns I have been involved in focus on targeting a politician who represents us to vote or advocate for a certain position that can be successful. The other is shifting the public mindset, ultimately leading to politicians voting in the way we want them to, hopefully, unless they are just taking the money and running. Shifting the public narrative is huge. I do not know how much effect, if any, the work we do has on people in the Israeli government or in Hamas's government. I do not think they care like we do. I do not think they look at or care what we do. And then if they look at us, they just think we are stupid. So I do not think the work that we are doing is trying to affect them.

I do not know if they can be affected by us, but it is changing public opinion so that the public opinion can change the voting process that changes the politicians that change, like what is going on up top, that maybe changes what is going on on the other side of the world; maybe. That is the pipeline or the trickle down of the system. I guess we are trickling up, which is harder because water goes down, not up. When I think about that, I may become pessimistic or discouraged. I am wondering if anything we do is ever going to make a difference on a large scale. I know on a small scale, it will. But is any of this going to be the thing that creates a permanent ceasefire, like the release of hostages and a new system that people can live under safely. I do not have that answer.

Looking to the past and movements that have been successful, like the civil rights movement, the women's suffrage movement, and the labor movement. All of those things have made huge strides. They are not by any means solved. Our movements use the same tools, tactics, and ways of organizing that they did because they work. Some of those same people are supporting the movements today, but knowing that they also had to start small and build up until big enough stuff happened, and then, like we took three steps back and then jumped

ahead again, it is possible to make a major change; it just takes so long. I definitely get impatient like why is it not fixed now.

Long-term actions include, for example, building counter archives like we did. I believe that building educational channels and opportunities for exchange and discussion is crucial. Another example is the weekly strikes we organized, which provided the space to discuss it. Even though it might not be super safe, it felt safe enough and we had very moving exchanges there.

There are these short-term actions that can be a response to certain broader political legislations or invitations from the university. These little actions can be a sit-in, a demo, a performance, or an interruption. Even with little people, it can sometimes have a loud response.

### **Can collective justice be reached with solidarity? Do we have shared goals and visions?**

I hope that ultimately we all want to have an everyday life. To have a family, study. Most people want to choose life, and we can together envision that. It is a hope because when I see Hamas' behavior in the war, they do not value life. I do not think all the Palestinians are like that. But it is still hard for me to see beyond Hamas because I am not exposed to the good people. Maybe the citizens there also try to fight for it. I know we are fighting for things to change politically. I do not blame them; they live under the Hamas regime. I am also not saying we are innocent; our government's actions now are absurd and bizarre. Most people do not know what is going on. We just want to bring back our people. I might have contradicted myself in what I am saying, but it all depends on factors that are not me.

Peace is a sensitive term right now. How can one think of peace while a genocide is going on? Nevertheless, I think that we need to focus on agreements revolving around collective political strategy, such as stopping Germany from importing and exporting weapons to/from Israel, pushing Germany and the EU to impose sanctions on Israel, and recognizing a Palestinian state. The EU has this power, but it just does not use it. This is not my analysis; it is a consensus in most movements. Therefore, it is important to consolidate this or a movement around it.

I have two main concerns that come to mind at the moment. One thing that I do have a solution for, especially because of my Israeli identity, is that specifically, a lot of German and generally those who do not identify with the left will have problems with the manifestation of Palestinian nationalism in the way it is present in the bigger protests, whether it is a keffiyeh, Palestinian flag, or certain chants. That is because in the past few decades, the Western mainstream media has led to much stigmatization of Palestinian national symbols as equivalent to terror. So those are the associations people have, and they do not want to associate themselves with what they conceive as terror. I do not have a solution for that. I mean,

obviously, we can arrange protests without any national symbols. Some groups do that, like 'Israelis for Peace', Amnesty International, and other groups, mainly NGOs, that have arranged bigger protests. I think it is because of the thought that Palestinian national symbols would alienate many people, not necessarily Israelis, but also the German public. I sensed that a different crowd went to those protests. While some certainly came because they felt more comfortable, others did not go because of that. The second issue is that in Germany, it is hard to maintain political movements, at least compared to other countries like France and Ireland. Social movements in Germany are usually short-lived, at least in my historical perspective. A good example is last year's movement against the AFD, which saw a high turnout, with hundreds of thousands of people participating in protests. But it decayed rather quickly, and now you hear almost nothing of it. Currently, the AFD is projected to be the strongest force in the next elections. Even this movement, which had no alienation, had a clear cause and nothing that could delegitimize it. The movement even involved bourgeois politicians. Nevertheless, it decayed in about half a year. Even when there are shared goals and a vision, a more general problem remains: how to build long-lasting social movements in Germany.

It needs to center on Palestinians and Palestinian lives. Jews and Israelis need to understand that they get to be hurt and that they get to be mourning. A power dynamic still exists, and a level of complacency persists. Again, it all comes back to people being willing to grow and to be proven wrong. I think it comes as a space where people are willing to learn together and to confront their own biases and the biases of their communities, and to try to form a nation based on trust. I am unsure what that would entail, and I am also unsure if it is feasible.

Regarding shared goals and vision, it largely depends on who is in charge, and there is only so much that can be done when working off a lived experience that is not your own. I believe the common thread must definitely focus on solidarity. My generation, in particular, falls into the trap of thinking we have all the answers. Knowing that is not the case and that there has to be continued and emphatic room for growth.

I am gonna say yes. And again, because of what I was just saying about seeing previous movements and their successes. We used to enslave people, and now we do not. Their slave labor still exists. But we have made major strides. Things have changed, and things that people thought would never change, like things that people adamantly opposed, they wanted slavery to continue. That was good for them. That does not exist anymore. And people's minds were changed, most people. Maybe not obviously, but some people have shown us they will always be racist. But there will be constant backlash and pushback. At the same time, people of color can vote, and women can vote. It is really, really hard, but some trans people can get gender-affirming health care. So those are the glimmers of hope. People who have different perspectives from me on Israel-Palestine really do not want the future and the vision that I have, but also, if I think about it in the way of those other movements, people did not want gay

people to get married. Now, in the US, in most states, gay people can get married. So we shall see.

I think we do have shared goals and visions. We want to be safe in our identities. If we untangle the fact that our safety is not reliant upon other people's non-existence, we can get there. I mean, that is simple to say, and obviously, there is a lot of work involved in being able to do that. If people can unlearn their conditioning, like the hatred of the other, and not believe everything they are taught, then I think it is possible. I have to hope it is possible.

Yes, I mean this is what I believe in. Even though it may not always seem like this, believing in it makes it possible. For me, the concept of solidarity is about striving for collective liberation from structural injustice. Everyone probably has their own vision, but I think there is also a shared vision that is significant.

In the end, even with right-wing people. There is a poor neighborhood that is very marginalized in Berlin, with a lot of Nazis here. I would not be in solidarity with them. But when it comes to why we are politically active, when you break it down. It is about speaking from a similar position of feeling discriminated against and structurally excluded from society. I would not say we shared a vision because their vision is different, and I, as a radicalized person, do not have a place in it. What comes out of it and how we imagine liberation are very different. People with mixed backgrounds are getting racist looks there, and the writing in the graffiti is crazy. Some leftists spray it over, but it is like a constant fight.

I suppose solidarity lays the groundwork for collective justice, but to achieve that, it requires a lot of actions, time, and effort from the community. Again, our shared vision is to dismantle the oppressive system(s) that kill and divide. We need to look at all issues from an intersectional point of view, i.e., capitalism needs fascism and racism.

### **What are the disadvantages of collective justice?**

It is hard to know ahead of time, but I will see if it is worth it if there are no terror attacks post-peace. It will create many issues within Israeli society, especially within the Haredi and religious population; they probably will not like it. People will leave the country, and families will fall apart. I assume people will not disagree with peace; they will feel like they are not part of the nation, the country, and would not like to be here. The population's composition might change because of that.

First, justice is not just one thing; For example, from a totally different context, if I were a German after the Holocaust, and I wanted to pursue justice. I will have a certain conception of what justice is. Based, maybe, on the conversation I had with other Germans, with Jews, or with other people. I will attempt to follow this established notion of justice and approach it from

my personal perspective. When pursuing justice as someone who is not directly affected by the corresponding injustice, one risks overlooking the perspectives of those who are. It is a bit abstract, but put into the context of Israel-Palestine and Germany, I can imagine that there are Germans who believe in Human rights and justice, but for them, justice is to rebuild Gaza and go back to the status quo, for instance. For Gazans, this is probably not what collective justice is. As I mentioned earlier, justice is a flexible concept that must be accompanied by dialogue with those to whom justice is being done. It is not a direct disadvantage. I think it is worth pursuing things through a process of dialogue, even when it does not directly lead to the solution we want, as long as it is part of the broader effort to create a better and just world.

Some relationships will be lost, but I think it is worth it.

I do not think there are any disadvantages. I mean, I do not think this is really a disadvantage, but I guess one could say it is. I think of my example of how I no longer use Spotify, so it is harder for me to stream music. But is that really a disadvantage in the broader picture? It is literally fine. I am fine.

I do not think there are any disadvantages or negative points. It is a place to reach a utopian, imaginative place. It is a place that can be reached in micro spaces, but is more of an imaginative practice. In the full collective justice state, moment or space, there should also be space for people's own views and aspirations. However, I assume that people who cannot agree on the principles and values of equality and differentiation will have to take action.

There is always a risk of failing to protect the most marginalized, judging them hastily, and making decisions too quickly. There has to be a certain level of knowledge formation and access to knowledge and information to make informed decisions. Sometimes these processes take a really long time. However, if the change is made too quickly and exceeds the actual need, it might not achieve the desired justice where it is most needed.

- **Is it worth doing it despite the disadvantages?**

It might be worth it; it depends on what will happen along the way, how many people we will sacrifice, and how long it will take. If it promises my kids a safer future, I will be willing for it to be time-consuming. It is not easy to say it, but there will surely be sacrifices of human lives, conflicts, and complications. Peace is worth it; finally finding a solution is worth a lot. I want to raise my kids in a peaceful world.

Yes, a hundred percent. Other people's safety, equality, and solidarity are worth anything.

If people cannot agree that Palestinians are humans and that it is a disadvantage for them to be their neighbor, then for them, it might be very inconvenient. But looking from a human rights

perspective, it is the only way to go if we acknowledge everyone. For me, it is the only way to go. If we do more separation and segregation, it would end up in more violence, and I think that is what we are seeing right now. People, both Israelis and Palestinians, are increasingly less willing to acknowledge, tolerate, and accept the humanity of the other. This is a particularly unfortunate moment to think of justice and peace, as both sides are unwilling to accept even the most basic minimum of the other person's humanity. You cannot do anything with this. For me, it is the only way to go: to reinforce and persist in the humanity of others. This is the only way even to believe that this might be possible. If we cannot believe this is the way to go, what else can we do? Should we go to another land, conquer another land to build another fence to protect Palestinians, to expel other people? No, we should not.

When I think of transformative justice processes, it is important, and it is the only future where we can abolish the prison complex. The prison complex just reproduces trauma, and it is not actually bringing people back into society. To truly achieve collective justice, you must engage in a transformative justice process. This lengthy and complex endeavor involves dismantling certain societal structures, hierarchies, and power dynamics, as well as identifying bystanders. Many people will have to be held responsible. That also makes collective justice difficult; people must examine their own wrongdoing. That can be hard to really face; it is dismantling the ego of all of this and acknowledging what my privilege does to others. Although I am not using it, it still impacts my daily life. So, compare it with, you need to be an anti-racist, not only not be racist to you.

# Conclusion piece

February 2026

I am approaching the writing of the project's conclusion after laying it aside for a while. So I look at things with new observations and, at the same time, am reminded of the old ones.

While the questions aim to foster an understanding of how broader solidarity can be built, they also touch on my other points of discussion on Israel/Palestine.

To begin with, I would like to thank BCSH for the opportunity to conduct this research at this time, Diaspora Alliance for its support, and all those involved. Nonetheless, I would like to express my appreciation for those people. Who not only decided to open up and share their experiences and thoughts with me, but also their humanity. My interview challenged them to question the relation between identity and opinions, their own and others', and what they have been going through. Not just them, but as a world. I was able to interview individuals who are often overlooked by the mainstream media and public because of their young age (and possibly other reasons). As a young person myself, that is what pushed me to interview people my age. I find it paradoxical that adults talk about us, the younger generation, as those who will save the world, raising us with countless compliments and not sparing on kind words, but not letting us be heard. Thus, this project is dedicated to providing young people with an outlet to speak their minds to the world.

During the interview, I tried to keep my cool and not comment or share. Being an observer proved to be harder than I thought. There were times when I was asked by the interviewee to share, or I wanted to dig deeper into a topic, and at times I did. I had to stick to my image and my plan. I think that is always the difficulty when engaging with such humanist topics.

The conclusion piece is the final part of my project and is intended to be a personal reflection and synthesis of the interviews. If there is an opening, there must be a closing. The experience of interviewing and learning from others' experiences enriched my knowledge and understanding of solidarity, Israel/Palestine, and various perspectives. Thus, it is one worth reflecting on and writing about.

The anonymization of the interviewees was a significant concern throughout outreach, interview conduct, and the writing process. Even so, I eventually decided to anonymize my identity. The interviewees shared experiences and opinions that could be criminalized, politicized, and instrumentalized. Prior to conducting the interviews, I had researched the instrumentalization of activists, specifically of young activists in Germany and Berlin. The case of the [deportation of four activists was the one that stood out](#); it forced me to see the place I currently call home differently. Making the concern for freedom of expression disturbingly realistic in what I considered, until then, those who are in support of it. Some interviewees who had previously experienced it were far more concerned and asked to remove certain details. I was surprised by how many layers there are to the discussion about Israel/Palestine, before we get to take care of lost lives and prevent any. It was a surprise that gave way to familiar despair. To question why I write instead of act; is this all I have got or all I can? And how can I do more? Leading to frustration. Nevertheless, the anonymization allowed much more to be said; even if the ideal would have been for one to stand behind his opinions, reflections, and experiences. As one can read on the background page, the individuals I interviewed come from diverse backgrounds; however, most identify as Jewish. I attribute that to two main reasons: my background as a Jewish-Israeli and the silencing of activists all across the globe on that matter. Still, being Jewish is just a small part of their identity; different life paths have shaped them. Talking to different people about Israel/Palestine made me feel more comfortable and confident in discussing this matter. It has opened up a new door to talking with others who frame themselves differently from me, like pro-Palestinians, anti-Zionists, and supporters of BDS. At the same time, I have clearer red lines, like racism and discrimination (of all involved), an understanding of what humanist and dehumanizing approaches look like, and they are constantly with every conversation I have. Going forward, I will approach conversations with curiosity and open-mindedness, to listen and understand, not with the idea that I must convince the other person to be on my side. It is not like that was not what I was doing before; I was, but now I am confident this approach is the appropriate one. It portrays itself as natural to impose your opinion on others; this feature of humans is not just about 'you see my country is right' or 'the right side of history,' especially in the approach many Israelis and the state of Israel have been promoting. We, humans, do not like to be proven wrong. Unless, I guess, if it is positive, 'I am better than what I thought' attitude. I try not to mind being proven wrong and

treat the opinions I hold differently, more fluidly; in line with this is the best convincing argument I've heard, but I am open to thinking differently. I learned the importance of listening carefully before speaking my mind, out of respect and to foster a humanist conversation.

Through reading materials on the topic and interviewing, I came to see my nationality as an aspect of my identity, not my whole identity. Not letting this label define who I am. Surely, I cannot delete my Israeli identity, and I do not want to. But I am a person of my own. Similarly to the people I interviewed, and all other people in the world. I practice not judging a person based on their 'on paper' identity. Talking rather than speculating. Not being stuck in the label we created, which I hope to extend the approach beyond myself.

The general need to talk about Israel/Palestine and all that is related was prevalent among all interviewees. They explained how the unfolding events of October 7 had influenced their lives, whether directly or indirectly. They highlighted the need to share their experiences, reflect, and give it some thought. The interviewees who have been engaged in politics and are politically active see value in talking about Israel/Palestine whenever possible. Emphasizing the importance of having proper conversations that are structured, pluralist, and without censorship.

Between the lines of the words of non-activist interviewees, in mentioning the longing to trust in one's country, in one's people. In my interpretation, they are grasping the collapse of the subjective, unified, positive image of people, organizations, and large bodies (red and blue, page 23). The confusion between actively paying respect and questioning those you pay respect to, not knowing where you should stand. While at the same time wondering why the heck their actions seem so wrong. Is my country taking care of me? To which critics should I listen to, to the people I know, to the 'other' side? Who is criticizing for the sake of criticizing, and who is utilizing it? Within it lies the question of justification: under what conditions can an action be justified when it harms the other?

## **Solidarity - Why and Now?**

### **Why?**

Specifically on the matter of Israel/Palestine, there is a huge division between the Israeli 'side' and its allies and the Palestinians 'side' and its allies. Preventing by fear, by hate, by resentment, the talk with those who might be in disagreement with you, while the individual might long to talk and understand. Worldwide, extreme political leaders and large bodies such as universities and religious organizations are contributing to division. The Berlin universities systematically make great efforts to silence the activists by accusing them of violence and of extremist political activism. The university employs efforts against antisemitism, but according to the interviewees, it is just about silencing students who stand in solidarity with Palestine and not to support Jewish students (orange, page 25). In NYC, it is described that the Jewish space is dominated by organizations that are from the white, Ashkenazi class. The general approach of large influential organizations provokes an ignorance of the everyday people, Palestinians, Israelis, Jews, Arabs, and others. This causes some to constantly be triggered by their own identity (Grey, page 25). The effort of some to silence individuals, communities, and activists from expressing their thoughts and from talking with each other only causes more frustration among all involved.

### **Now?**

The world experiences cycles of escalation and de-escalation of world, national, and regional affairs. I refuse to believe that times now are worse than ever, as a matter of optimism and changemaking. It simply cannot be that way. On the same line of thought, I reject the idea that the status quo is unchangeable, for good and bad; revolutions have been successful in combating slavery, addressing systemic feminist causes like voting and employment, yet those are still present in our societies. The work is not only about revolutionizing the system but also about maintaining and advocating it. The rise of ethnonationalism, right-wing politics, and forms of racism is actively working to separate the people, like the co-existence of pro-Israel actions and speech with antisemitic segments and behaviors, making it difficult to understand politics. To this add polarization, populism, multiworld crises, intersectionality, and the difficulties of daily lives worldwide. Politics is hard to grasp; it is easier to avoid, to be blind, to

turn your shoulder to it, saying, 'I already have enough to deal with.' The interviewees testified similarly about themselves, pointing out that they felt overwhelmed (Red, page 27), yet still had a sense of urgency about it (green, page 27), and that they could not fully ignore or neglect it, since things remained unchanged or even worsened (Burgundy and Orange, page 29).

### **Antisemitism and Israel**

Antisemitism and Israel have been long connected since the establishment of the country. A central discourse remains on the manifestation of the new antisemitism, whether anti-Israel and anti-zionism means antisemitism. I argue that both are interconnected, but one is not the same; without a doubt, one can lead to the other. Personally, I have experienced antisemitic fragments just by saying that I am Israeli. In Germany, which is known to be blindly pro-Israel due to its past, there is still a sense that antisemitism has risen (green page 31), yet it has been reduced and not targeted. With all that effort in mind to protect the Jewish state, real antisemitism remains off track and neglected, Israel's actions are putting Jews on the front, as if combating antisemitism is not one of the causes for Israel's establishment.

In the US, as Blue (page 31) points out, experiencing more antisemitism is in relation to Israel. Or when Grey (page 32) mentions the vandalism and cyberbullying of Jewish people during their college time. [Antisemitism in relation to Israel can manifest in a way of holding Jews accountable for the actions of the state and the government](#); since Israel is perceived by some as one of the main bodies to represent the Jews, as a whole, [forgetting that the population of American Jews and Israeli Jews is about the same](#). Not only that, but in the American Jewish community, there is a tendency to demonize one whose opinion is perceived as radically different (Grey, page 32), maintaining a righteous exclusionary political position within a repressed minority group.

### **Israeli-Judaism and American-Judaism**

The film Israelism highlighted Israel's strong structures in the Jewish institutions in the US, to ensure a one-sided pro-Israel education that is hard to shake off, making non-Israeli Jews protectors of the Jewish state. However, they might never have lived in or resided in. Blue (pages 34) elaborated on ways in which Israel was closely tied to American Judaism, like the

[Israel Day Parade in NYC](#), or when she did not know how to tell her friends why she would not be participating in [Birthright Israel](#). She specifically elaborated on the preparation for the Israel trip at a Jewish American school. Where she had Israel studies for a whole semester that omitted the Palestinian lives in Israel, in her experience, other Jews seemed to be taking what they learnt at face value, without questioning it. Some non-Jews were curious to ask and listen. Understandably, for Jews, the matter of Israel has emotional baggage; with that in mind, Jews are still more likely to understand the significance of Israel to Judaism. It is not to say that she does not experience the anti-zionist movement, like people at her school talking about 'what they will do to zionists', in her presence, which she perceives as highly concerning.

### **polarization and division**

People experience difficulties in navigating a grey world and falling into a dichotomous perception of one or the other, us vs them. Israelis and Palestinians are being portrayed as their leaders, cancelling out any political spectrum of opinions. Instead of contributing to the silencing of the center, left opinions coming from the Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, and others, one should seek them and vocalize them; there is a reason they are not on the front page of the news. A claim I heard in Israeli discourse when the war began is that the majority of Gazans have chosen Hamas as their leader, so they can only blame themselves for their suffering. However, Americans have elected Trump, Israelis Netanyahu, and Germans Merz. So is the attitude one of blaming? If there is anyone to point the finger at, it is the ones who are actively acting, choosing, and directing.

To a certain extent, all the interviewees were concerned with division among communities; specifically, how activist groups and organizations can acknowledge one's pain and suffering and not the other's. Red (page 34) situated herself as a human rights supporter but does not want to be treated as a 'leftie' or 'traitor'. Purple (page 36) has discussed their difficulty in empathizing with the supporters of Israel as a militant, strong state that strives to win the war. They highlighted that it does not cross out any solidarity with the victims and hostages as a result of October 7. However, it troubles them when one cannot recognize the suffering of the other, considering that Jews have experienced great oppression and suffering throughout history and have received education on the Holocaust and its horror. Then, is this education

purposeless if we owe it to ourselves not to learn the lesson and become the perpetrators of the same? They encourage recognizing humanity in all, without giving different treatment to different communities. We should be able to comprehend that who we support can cause suffering too, and that our enemy can suffer. Then ask what more suffering will lead us to.

### **Antisemitism, political misuse, and the Palestine solidarity movement**

Antisemitism is a real phenomenon; Jews and Israelis are victims of discrimination due to their identity. We should all acknowledge that. With that being said, Islamophobia is also a thing, along with other forms of racism. Those Islamophobic narratives of Muslims care to control the world and make it Islamic seem all too familiar to how Judaism was seen as a counter to Christianity. 'The Jews want to control the world.' Needless to say, there are extremists in most religions that use religion as power. I might be naive, but I think most people want to live their lives peacefully, without fear, and to follow their beliefs.

The political misuse of discrimination is just unbearable to witness, making activism more risky. While the people are dealing with real problems, others are making a sweet lemonade out of their tears. The political misuse of antisemitism is used as a tool to silence Palestine solidarity movements with claims that their activism is antisemitic. Like in the German university (Burgundy, page 31), hiring on probation a non-qualified person to operate the antisemitism office, which was not tracing down threats but targeting Palestine solidarity, student activists. The officer tagged wearing Keffiyehs and public declarations of Palestinian solidarity as antisemitic. Not only that, but during the discussion, the Jewish Solidarity Collective's opinions were dismissed when their Jewishness was questioned, with German opinion considered more legitimate (Burgundy, page 32). Then, who speaks for whom, and who can speak for themselves?

### **Dehumanization**

In a lot of Jewish and Israeli spaces, there is a huge backlash from everything and everyone who is in support of Palestinians and their rights, let alone their independence. That usually stems from fear, a lack of interaction, and a lack of education. Again, instead of being curious and trying to understand what those people are on, people are choosing to label them as

antisemitic. Mocking them for being uneducated, brainwashed, and so on. This phenomenon is present as well in anti-Israel spaces, where people are quick to label IDF soldiers (who are everyone my age) as baby killers without understanding how military service works in Israel. Of course, it is more complicated than it seems. In Israel, we are raised on the saying 'It is good to die for our country' by Trumpeldor. It is a highly militaristic society that highly values the IDF service, in which soldiers are seen as heroic protectors of Israelis and the state. Soldiers are indeed sacrificing themselves and their mental and physical health for what they view as a greater cause than themselves. But then in places abroad, the image is the opposite. They are painted as violent perpetrators of Zionist ideology. Do not hate the player, hate the game, and those who run it.

Throughout the last year, I have been wondering why we cannot just talk, me, you, we, and others. Being open to speaking up is a challenge. Between cancel culture, political correctness, and socially specific behaviors, I struggle to be frank about my opinions. While it can be my problem, I observe it everywhere. Do we shut ourselves off to maintain a normal life, or do we? Families, friends, and acquaintances; what kind of relationships do we want to have?

When introducing politics into the conversation, there is a possibility of reaching a discussion written in hell. Arguing, shouting at each other, reaching the lowest bottom of speech and frustration. I certainly hope this is foreign to you. But for me, it comes too close to home. Probably not surprising that politics brings some hardship with it. But still, I want to slam my head against the wall, asking myself why I cannot change it. I struggle to talk politics, and I cannot express myself as I wish. I am afraid of being judged or of losing connections I care about.

### **Can we converse?** (interviewees' sharing)

Red (page 34) commented that as an Israeli, she does not want to cause further damage to the image of the country when speaking with non-Israelis, while simultaneously feeling the need to legitimize Israel's actions. She is torn between loyalty to the nation, her personal criticism of the government, and her support for human rights, which prevents her from voicing her criticism and human rights allyship to Israelis and people abroad.

Knowledge and history of Israel/Palestine differ across sources, promoting agendas and ideas; the media also plays a role, as its political side is usually hidden behind its reports and articles. Depending on what one consumes, there is a perspective gap, which is hard to bridge (Green, page 34). In Germany, the media excludes certain perspectives and engages in unequal treatment (Burgandy, page 37). Media slogans replace evidence and knowledge; people disregard facts and information not included in the media (Orange, page 39). Buzzwords and historical narratives cease a conversation. Nevertheless, the focus should not be on the past, but on how we can create a better future. Blue (page 34) highlights education in their answer, stating that they often observe Jews taking what they learned as fact without even seeking further information. Purple comments that Jewish education does not include the bigger picture of Israel's establishment. They add that not only the information but also its acknowledgement (page 35). It is far more difficult to discuss with those who do not acknowledge others' pain.

The degree of qualification and confidence matters. Blue (page 35) shared that she feels unqualified to have this conversation because she lacks knowledge of the topic. But is it a lack of knowledge or a lack of confidence to approach a conversation? After all, confidence to speak up does not equal knowledge or the ability to add value. It is not that one should not be self-aware of their knowledge and abilities, but empathy and approach are also key. Then she goes on to describe her successful conversation, which showcases her ability to talk and share.

We are a society that makes decisions based on feelings rather than on informed ones (Grey, page 41). Trauma and emotions play a part, as Burgandy (page 36) discussed. The Palestinian

side is repressed, and Jewish experience is triggered to re-traumatization. Purple (page 36) openly shares their difficulty in discussing people's own suffering with those who do not acknowledge others' suffering. Yet still they try to engage in it because of its importance.

Finding a safe space is difficult; whoever is having the conversation has an agenda that usually disqualifies other opinions; no matter your political position or maturity, those conversations are bound to hurt (Grey, page 39).

Antisemitism, racism, and their history make it easier to deploy them to political misuse or a form of discrimination. As Burgundy (page 38) highlights, they were criticized for antisemitism using racist tropes due to their mixed background, hinting at 'inherent' resentment. Orange (page 38) points out that the German academic reinforces anti-Israel criticism of Israel as antisemitism, and is embedded in politics and education.

In the times of instant gratification and information, one can barely comprehend the existence of multiple truths, let alone the truth as complex, contradictory, and shaped by perspective. Why one will, after all, it is easier to get an answer than sit through no answer. AI and digital tech control the information people consume during their extensive screen time, shaping their knowledge and political standpoints through algorithms. It further isolates individuals by trapping them in their information bubbles and preventing exchange, growth, and reflection. The media captures one's loneliness and isolation by feeding into one's fear and anxiety, which keeps those in power stable (Orange, page 39). The German school system, as Orange (page 39) points out, depoliticizes how the world functions, rather than educating students about capitalism and its exploitation of people, which racism justifies.

Adding to those, America is already highly polarized on topics like Religion, abortion, gay and women's rights; Israel/Palestine feels just like one of them, creating an additional layer to the war, to a war between everyday people (Grey, page 39). Leaders want the power and attention of a leader, but remain mostly passive when it comes to resolving conflict. They lean toward targeting the weak minority voice rather than the actual threat (Grey, page 40)

Burgandy (page 38) shared that, at times, the collective's internal criticism shifted their attention from acting to resolving disagreements; discussion topics ended up causing conflicts and division in the group, shifting the activism further from the initial cause. Yet they feel like there must be a way to solve disagreements.

Dehumanizing and demonizing others for their opinions without even a basis for claims divides people further. Grey (page 41) shared being called a Hamas supporter, Zionist, and IDF, labels they do not identify with. They shared that during their college time, Jews were doxed and labeled as Zionists.

Suffering is judged based on one's identity, and not on the overall idea of suffering that transcends any identification. However, one should recognize a certain group with a shared identity that suffers more than others, while highlighting that suffering is suffering; it should not be hierarchical. A group that is oppressed or was oppressed should be understanding of others' suffering, supporting them rather than contributing to their oppression.

In one's own community, there is a tendency to think highly of oneself; ego plays a part. Having too much pride without being realistic about their standing in the wider society formation makes it harder for them to navigate the world safely outside of their bubble (Grey, page 42).

### **Principles and practices - What can we do?**

Prior to the conversation (if it is not spontaneous), having the details in advance helps one feel comfortable and confident opening up about it. Before discussing the topic, get to know the people on a personal level (Red, page 42). Possibility to find out and acknowledge what one can contribute to the conversation; one does not have to be fluent in facts to participate in the conversation on the topic (Purple, page 44). Be mindful of one's identity and how it might affect their position (Burgandy, page 45).

Begin the conversation from a specific point you can both discuss, and that builds trust, and then expand it (Burgandy, page 45). Practice nonviolent communication in small conversations that offer self-reflection to express your opinion without relating it to the other person, and to understand your feelings and perspective (Burgandy, page 44).

Conversation is two-way. One should participate in a conversation if one is willing to explain oneself and listen to others, letting go of defensiveness, avoiding shutting down, and the need to 'prove' one's point. (Blue, page 43, Purple, page 44, Burgundy, page 45, and Orange, page 45). One should constantly remind oneself of shared humanity and compassion. captivate and maintain an environment of honesty and openness; be curious to learn and investigate the situation, rather than judge it (Red, page 42).

During the conversation, one should respect the other person by not interrupting them, giving them the freedom to develop their point of view, and not pushing them toward an opinion or idea, acknowledging the fluidity and dynamics of opinions (Red, page 42). Think through the other's perspective and expose oneself to their information resources to understand them better (Burgandy, page 45). Do not assume that one agrees with you or that one must agree with you (Blue, page 43).

Hold spaciousness to process the conversation and emotions. Information. Dialogue does not begin and end with one conversation; show empathy by offering a stopping point, building a relationship with the other, and coming back to it (Purple, page 44).

One should share their background knowledge, as narratives and histories differ across many criteria (Green, page 42), and agree to fact-check information (Blue, page 43). Acknowledge the spectrum of a topic (Grey, page 46). Sharing one's experiences and background in a respectful and considerate manner to the other's position, rather than using slogans, buzzwords, and triggering words (Green, page 42). Remember that information and facts are not all that matter; humanity speaks (Purple, page 44).

Be aware of when one should stop the conversation, because it harms more than it benefits (Green, page 43).

Further ideas:

Look into the work of Dorit Price Levine. In her workshop, she created a community agreement using storytelling and co-counselling, while emphasizing exploring identities and the pain that lies within them, and maintaining respect regardless of background or identity. The workshop was held in person, with no phones. The focus was on developing one's Jewish identity and relationship to Israel/Palestine. People shared in turns, and reflected on what they heard from others and affirmed it. One was encouraged to support others if needed, in rotating groups of three (Grey, page 46).

We are meant to sit down and share food (Purple, page 80). Build trust and community through sitting together to a meal, possibly discussing difficult topics.

Hosting events that are not necessarily political, to firstly connect with others before introducing a topic, with the risk of division.

Throughout the material I read for this project, the importance of free speech was evident. As Ken Stern pointed out in his book 'The Conflict over the Conflict', it is important for universities and colleges to be places where they talk with students about ideas that might shock them, because they exist. It is not to support those ideas, but to learn about them and from them, their roots and sources, and to criticize them. It sits on the same reason why 'The Wave' or the Stanford prison experiment is taught.

## **Definitions of interviewees**

Zionism and its counterpart, Anti-Zionism, are all over in the discourse about Israel/Palestine. I asked my interviewees to explain how they see those ideas.

### **Non-Zionism** - Grey's own definition (page 46 - 47)

The base of it is not supporting a religiously dominated country, whether it is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, since historically (specifically also in the region), religious supremacy harms everyone. Non-Zionism does not see Jews as the majority of the country, but envisions that everyone has the right to live on this land regardless of religion, as long as they agree to practice in peace.

Following the [horseshoe theory](#), it emphasizes avoiding extreme political positions and polarization while seeing the spectrum in all concepts. For example, in the spectrum of the anti-Zionist camp, some support a left equilibrium society and others who support an Islamic extremist state; neither is on board with the other. Zionism also includes various positions, like a state only for Orthodox settlers, and some Zionists support a liberal state.

According to Grey, the anti-Zionist camp wants a Palestinian country that is a Muslim majority, which does not feel safe for them or other people either. Thus, if the state is a democracy, it could be a religious country, but not dominated by religious values.

### **Anti-Zionist and Zionism** - Burgandy's own remark (pages 56- 57)

**Zionism** is the ideology and belief of an ethno-nationalist Jewish state, whatever it looks like. It supports an Israeli state that is exclusive to Jews, and at its core, supports ethnic-religious supremacy. Zionism enables non-Israeli Jews to live in Israel based on religion and ethnicity, while Palestinians who were born and raised there cannot live there. They reject it based on being anti-nationalist and against nation-states, thus anti-Zionist, highlighting that any nation-state has no right to exist and the violent colonial nature of borders.

**Anti-Zionism** is not a matter of the people, but of the state. Their interpretation of Israel has no right to exist is not that the people have no right to exist, nor that they should all leave or not exist. It is that the state of Israel has no right to exist as long as it occupies Palestine, parts of

Syria, and other territories it occupied in the past (in Egypt and Lebanon), and is currently executing a genocide. It is a discussion for Palestine, although the idea of having a Palestinian state does not seem realistic. They also reject nationalism within the Palestinian movement, commenting that groups like the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and the PLFP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) were less nationalistic to begin with and supported left-socialist ideology and maintained connectivity to other liberation movements in the region, like the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). For Israel, they claim, it was comfortable to support Hamas to weaken any left resistance. They reject the nationalistic idea of Palestine for only Arab Muslims since they are minority groups within the land, like Bedouins and Jewish Palestinians. For instance, there are Kurds in Palestine who hold the family names Al-Kord and Al-Kordi that have been assimilated into Arabic society.

**Nationalism** cannot save us. It is a common reaction to Genocide. Post-genocide Jewish society needed to save itself; the society does not trust others because of what happened. Palestinians are probably in a similar position right now after decades of lacking any support and experiencing only oppression and persecution. The Kurdish society can teach us to see things differently: they initially pursued nationalism. However, they realized it was not the path to freedom, so they redirected their efforts toward land autonomy and a basic democratic confederacy. Nonetheless, Palestinians are not given a chance, movement, possibility to dream, imagine, and think it through in this current movement, about how they would like to live on the land because of the constant oppression. Therefore, it is unfair to judge them by how they believe in their liberation. Regardless, outside criticism is valid, but it does not take away their right to resist.

**Anti-Zionist** - Purple's interpretation (pages 83 - 84)

They approach the explanation of Anti-Zionism to others with openness and respect to maintain a safe environment for engaging with it. Anti-Zionism is the rejection that Israel exists as a Jewish state for our safety, that non-Israeli Judaism relies upon the existence of Israel in its current position, and, from the American perspective, is the rejection of American tax money being used to kill people, target journalists, murder children, and spread lies about everyday people. It promotes the celebration of diasporic Judaism, that is, the possibility of having a

beautiful, full, and valid Jewish experience independent of one's location. Lying in the idea that all land is holy and embracing the earth, each land is holy to its indigenous people who live there; so it becomes holy for you, too. It is important to remember that Judaism has existed without the state of Israel for most of the time. There is a conflation between Eretz (state) Israel, the biblical holy land of Israel, and the current post-imperialist Western society called Israel; they are not the same. It is the same land, but not the same place. Some Anti-Zionist scholars and rabbis solidified the idea that Eretz Israel is a utopia one strives for, not a real place one can ever reach. Instead of trying to build a Jewish ethno-state, maybe we should try to build a good world for everyone, which is Eretz Israel, the land of milk and honey.

### **Between Zionism, Anti-Zionism, and pro-X and anti-X**

I hope I captured a sense of hope in you about our shared future on the land. Interviewees, those individuals, reassured me that most people want to live their lives without any interruption. Those people care for the other person, but are labeled as if they do not. I do not want to glorify them. I want to humanize them. It was also incredible to see their thoughtfulness and vulnerability. They seem to understand their humanism and admit that they are not perfect and can be wrong, or even proven wrong. There are awful people in this world, and amazing ones. We need to shift our focus to the good ones and be more hopeful.