



Jewish when it counts



Name: **Tali B**

Gender: **Female**

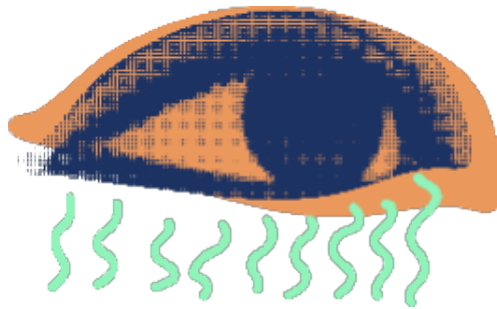
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I realise that 7 October was a massacre without a name. I bleed for those hostages and I mourn my brothers and sisters every day. I bleed for every single person who went because they were Jewish. Realising that 239 hostages is not just 239 but 1 plus 1 plus 1 plus 1.



To make your reading experience more enjoyable and my words more intelligible, I'd like to take the risk of introducing myself. My name is Tali, I'm eighteen years old and I'm starting my first year of law at a Parisian university. My surname, which doesn't match my looks at all, hints at my Jewishness. It's one of those names with sounds that take you on a journey to the Middle East, that contains 'Aiche' meaning "life" in Arabic and that has now been compromised by Hamas.



For the less perceptive among you, you might almost think that I'm not Jewish, but perhaps Arab. The woman whose Muslim father married a Caucasian woman who enjoys the culinary folklore of pungent spices, tajine and a swarthy complexion.

An Uber driver once asked me if I knew what 'loubia' was (a type of bean). A harmless question that just meant "judging by your surname, I'm not sure you're 100% white, but your nose is far too thin for you to be Jewish, so let's give it a go".

After 22 minutes of heated discussion with Amin, rated 5 stars on the app - the same rating as his mother Samia's dishes - I decided I had to change my name on the app. I would no longer be able to tell all the taxis in Paris that I belonged to them. After a few minutes' thought, I came up with Camille Bénard, a classic, French name that doesn't really mean anything. White, in a way, given the paleness of my complexion, but that would only be a short-lived surprise.

Then I remembered that changing your name to avoid admitting you're Jewish happened to my great-grandmother Thérèse Langelier - or Lagman, for those who dared to know the truth in 1939. She wasn't running away from the Ubers, but from the Nazis. You can hide a lot under a name. I've never been in an Uber called Uber, anyway.



A few lines ago, I used the word 'confess' to say that I was Jewish. I had to get to the bottom of the page to realise that. And now that we're sharing everything, I owe it to you to explain.

For me, being Jewish is above all a confession.

It's as if my birth was a crime that no one should know about. Joel Dicker quite rightly said that Jews were hypocrites. At least black people weren't able to hide the fact that they were black.

Telling everyone that I'm Jewish is like admitting that I'm Jewish. This admission is not always well received either. The cultural malaise - a term I'm sure I surely borrowed from a friend back home - means that I don't expect any reaction to my confession. It's as if I were using a swear word around well-educated people. It stains. Jewish. Jewish. First, it comes from the gut, it rises slowly, gets to the throat, there's a little blockage, then past the glottis, it comes out on its own. With a long, insistent F (Editor's note: JuiF in French). The same F as in "faite nous la guerre". I often write about my Jewishness, but always in pencil. I reserve the right to erase in case the Nazis arrive.

It's strange, but I'm afraid of Nazis like Madame Rosa in Romain Gary's novel *Life Before Us*. Romain Gary isn't his real name either.



I've been thinking a lot about Nazis since 7 October. I hope you don't mind, but I have to confess that when the war started, I felt nothing at all. I am aware that I recognise the horrors that are happening in Israel, I hear the suffering of the families and the pain of my people. But I have little empathy. I don't feel sick to my stomach or nervous, and I'm not even racist any more.

It's not the first time I've felt so empty in the face of tragedy. In 2021, on a trip to Poland. I followed in their footsteps, walked through the Children's Forest and looked into the eyes of the extermination camps. Perhaps it's because of a lack of vocabulary that I wasn't able to describe or write down what I felt, but I felt empty. When I saw my comrades sobbing, guilt took over my whole body, I said "why don't I cry? Why am I not sad? Am I a monster for being so insensitive to this vision of horror? This same feeling of guilt greeted me on 7 October.

Although I'm always very frank and belligerent in what I say, I felt like a loser. I felt nothing and did nothing, compared to my mother who was very committed to the fight. I am always scared of the Nazis..

On 13 October 2022, after two hours and twenty-two minutes, Elsa Zylberstein had managed to turn the 'emptiness' I felt into a huge slap in the face. After seeing the film *Simone* (the biography of Simone Veil), I cried for two days in a row. I now understand that it's not a void, it's my brain's ability to protect itself. It refuses to let me believe it's true. It refuses because it knows that we're afraid of the Nazis and that if we accept that it's true, the Nazis could have got us. Everything gets mixed up in my head: the Ubers, Poland, the Nazis and Elsa Zylberstein.

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And I'm always afraid that the Nazis will come looking for me.

