

Al Jazeera Bemoans the Celebration, in Italy, of Oriana Fallaci

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Oriana Fallaci, the celebrated Italian journalist who has been dead for 13 years, is the woman of the hour in Italy. Italian state television has broadcast a documentary about her life and work, in recognition of what would have been her 90th birthday. All of her books are being republished in a collected-works uniform format. The leading Italian politician, Matteo Salvini, repeatedly refers to her in glowing terms. For many Italians, she is both prophetess and patron saint; the woman who early on warned of the growing Islamic threat inside Europe, and the warrior who called for a campaign to reject and reverse that Muslim presence, which would require an end to the “buonismo” (goody-goodness) sentiment exhibited by many Europeans, including Christian clerics, who had opened wide the doors of their countries to Muslim migrants – a sentiment, and a policy, that she deplored.

She wrote that Muslim immigration was turning Europe into “a colony of Islam,” an abject place that she called “Eurabia,” (the term made famous by Bat Ye’or), which would eventually “end up with minarets in place of the bell-towers, with the burka in place of the mini-skirt.” Fallaci argued that Islam had always had designs on Europe, invoking the siege of Constantinople in the seventh century, and the Ottoman Empire’s subsequent assaults on the Balkans and Central Europe, with the highwater mark of Muslim Turkish conquest being the siege of Vienna in 1683. Fallaci argued that contemporary immigration from Muslim countries to Europe amounted to the same thing – invasion – only this time with “children and boats” instead of “troops and cannons.” And, as Fallaci described it, the “art of invading and conquering and subjugating” is “the only art at which the sons of Allah have always excelled.”

Al Jazeera, the propaganda outlet of the Qatari government, [has taken note](#) of Fallaci’s renewed popularity:

At his political rally in Milan in March, Italy’s far-right Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini mentioned two women: the Virgin Mary, who, he said “will lead us to victory”, and Oriana Fallaci, whom he described as “the founding mother of this Europe.”

One of Italy’s most famous journalists, Fallaci, who died in her late seventies in 2006, covered the Vietnam War and interviewed Henry Kissinger, Indira Gandhi, and Ruhollah Khomeini.

This summation of her life was far too brief. Fallaci had a long, distinguished, practically mythic career. She was involved in politics and war from her early youth. Her father was a partisan during the war, captured and tortured by the Germans. As a 14-year-old, she was a bicycle-riding courier for the Italian Resistance in Nazi-occupied Florence. In 1956,

she covered the Hungarian Revolution and the crushing of that uprising by the Soviet army. She covered the wars between India and Pakistan. For eight years, from 1967 to 1975, she repeatedly went back to Vietnam to cover the war there, frequently ending up in the midst of the most dangerous battles. She began as a strident critic of the American effort but became increasingly alarmed at the ruthlessness of the North Vietnamese and consequently, more sympathetic to the Americans. **She developed a great hatred for certain American leftists, threatening to "kick Jane Fonda in the ass and spit in her face for lying about her coverage of the Vietnam War and betraying the confidence of American POWs."** She went to Cambodia, where she managed to interview Prince Sihanouk just as the Khmer Rouge were gathering. She was with the protesting Mexican students in 1968 when 800 of them were killed by the police; she was shot three times. She interviewed Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, Fidel Castro in Cuba, and King Hussein in Jordan. She famously took apart Henry Kissinger, who when asked by her to explain his popularity, said: "The main point arises from the fact that I've always acted alone. Americans like that immensely. Americans like the cowboy who leads the wagon train by riding ahead alone on his horse, the cowboy who rides all alone into the town, the village, with his horse and nothing else." Exposed as comically full of himself, Kissinger always regretted allowing himself to be interviewed by her; he called it "my most disastrous decision."

Fallaci interviewed Golda Meir, who positively enchanted her for her forthright truth-telling; Meir, she said, was the most impressive of all the people she had ever interviewed. She interviewed Ariel Sharon, who despite her attempts to provoke him, did not take the bait, and she grew to like the aging warrior. She interviewed Regis Debray, the Communist would-be guerilla, in Bolivia, She reported on Spain under Franco, on the appointment of Juan Carlos as king. She interviewed Deng Xiaoping in Beijing; Chinese students flocked to her hotel in hopes of catching a glimpse of her; she was regarded by them

as an iconic warrior for freedom. She wrote many books, mostly non-fiction, but also *A Man* (1979), which was a fictional tribute to her great love, the Greek resistance fighter Alexandros Panagoulis, who died in a suspicious automobile accident in Athens three years after they met. Panagoulis had been imprisoned, and endured torture, for his failed attempt on the life of the Greek junta leader George Papadopoulos, in 1968. Only the tiniest part of her very full life is mentioned by Al Jazeera – that she interviewed Kissinger, Indira Gandhi, and Khomeini.

What Al Jazeera also left out was the fact that Fallaci had a special interest in Islam, Arabs, and Muslim leaders that long predated 9/11. She interviewed not just Khomeini, but Arafat, Khaddafi, and PFLP leader George Habash, a Christian Arab and a terrorist. She even embedded herself with a group of PLO fighters and came under Israeli bombardment. The PLO fighters refused to let her share their bomb shelter, directing her instead to a makeshift shed that was filled with warehoused explosives. She discovered that for the Muslims of the PLO, women, and especially Infidel women, were expendable. Her encounters with Arafat left her feeling only nausea and disgust; Khaddafi she found to be a semi-demented clown; George Habash she found strangely “likeable” at first, but in the end, merely a murderer who told her that “we believe that to kill a Jew far from the battleground has more of an effect than killing one hundred of them in battle.”

Khomeini was a humorless fanatic whom she nonetheless made laugh – his son said it was the only time in his life that he had seen his father laugh – by ripping off her chador in his presence, yelling about “these medieval rags!” He couldn’t believe anyone would dare to defy him as she did; he had to laugh at her chutzpah.

After September 11, she adopted an anti-Islam stance and today her legacy is enjoying a moment of renewed popularity.

She did not, as Al Jazeera claims, “adopt an anti-Islam stance” after 9/11. Her reaction to the atrocity on 9/11, her ferocious denunciation of Islam and the “sons of Allah,” had been decades in the making. She was “anti-Islam” beginning in the early 1960s. She “adopted” nothing, least of all a temporary “stance.” Over many years, she had traveled widely in Muslim countries, had observed Muslim peoples, had interviewed their leaders. Her deep “anti-Islam” convictions were the result of that long familiarity with, and study of, Muslims and Islam.

In 2019 Italy, Fallaci's unapologetic Islamophobia is alarmingly mainstream. The new ruling class is rediscovering Fallaci as a prescient thinker.

Shall we rephrase this tendentious bit to achieve a modicum of fairness? Can we leave out that propagandistic scare word “Islamophobia”? What about this: “In 2019, Fallaci’s fierce criticism of Islam and Muslims has become widely accepted. Many Italians have come to regard her as a prescient thinker.”

There is no “new ruling class” in Italy. The country’s leading politician is Matteo Salvini, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, whose appeal is that he is a populist, of humble origins, who has never part of any political ruling class. His chief rival, also a kind of stand-alone politician, is Beppe Grillo of the “Five Stars” movement and party. Grillo was a comedian before entering politics; he too was anti-establishment and has never been part of any “political ruling class,” nor is he today. The kaleidoscopic realignments of Italian parties and politicians testifies to the absence of such a “ruling class.” It is among all classes of society that Fallaci is being recognized, and hailed, as “prescient” in her Cassandra-like warnings about Muslim encroachments in Europe.

Streets or squares have been renamed after her in Pisa and Arezzo, in central Italy, and Genoa, further north.

A public garden was also dedicated to her in Sesto San Giovanni, an industrial town close to Milan, where the mayor blocked the construction of a mosque. He recently mentioned Fallaci in his inauguration speech: "Her exhortations to the West to wake up still resonate today."

In July, the lower chamber of Parliament approved the creation of low-denomination treasury bills that could also be used as a de-facto parallel currency to the euro. According to the plan's main proponent, the League's MP Claudio Borghi, the 20 euro bill should bear a picture of Fallaci.

For what would have been her 90th birthday, state-owned television channel RAI 2 aired a celebratory documentary about her.

At home, her ideas were not perceived as radical – her anti-Islam manifesto was first published in the country's most prestigious newspaper [Corriere della Sera].

But with rising anti-immigrant sentiment and with the far-right League party receiving almost 40 percent in the most recent elections, her message resonates with the current climate.

On September 28, 2001, a week [sic] after the September 11 attacks, Corriere della Sera, the Milan-based newspaper, published a five-page article titled *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio*, or *The Rage and the Pride*, in which Fallaci accused the West of being too soft on Islam and Muslim immigrants.

In Italy, she argued, "there is no place for muezzins, minarets, fake teetotalers, their f***** middle ages, and their f***** chadors."

From then on until her death, Fallaci stirred anti-Muslim sentiment.

Fallaci did not “stir anti-Muslim sentiment.” She was never a rabble-rouser. She did not harangue crowds, even virtual ones. She was much too literate and humorful, qualities rabble-rousers seldom possess. Originally, as a leftist, she was even sympathetic to the Arabs – including the Palestinians. But the reality mugged her. She reported from Muslim countries, interviewing their leaders, and even, in at least one case, accompanying PLO fighters in battle. She grew to detest the Muslims she met, interviewed, reported on. She heard what they said about the West, about Jews, about women. She took note of the triumphalism in their stories – that Islam would conquer Europe, would conquer the world. She paid the Muslims the tribute of taking their hopes and hates and dangerous dreams of genocide and world conquest seriously, something many in the West still refuse to do.

After the article in 2001, she wrote three books – The Rage and the Pride, The Force of Reason, and Oriana Fallaci Interviews Herself – in which she described the Muslim world as an “enemy we treat as a friend” and warned Europe about what she believed to be the danger of becoming “Eurabia.”

She borrowed the term from a conspiracy theory popularised by the Egyptian-born British writer Bat Ye’or (a pseudonym for Gisele Littman) about an alleged plan to “Islamise” Europe through mass immigration.

Bat Ye’or did not popularize a “conspiracy theory” about a plan to “Islamise” Europe. She provided copious documentation – not merely a “theory” – about the Euro-Arab Dialogue, which began just after the 1973 quadrupling of oil prices by OPEC. The E.A.D. was part of a French-led policy intended to increase European power vis-à-vis the United States by aligning its interests with those of the Arab countries. Bat Ye’or saw this “Euro-Arab Dialogue” as a primary cause of European hostility to Israel. Every charge she makes is backed up by written evidence, much of it little known agreements,

including cultural matters, made between Europeans and Arabs, that she included it in her book *Eurabia*. Al Jazeera's attempt to belittle Bat Ye'or, and thus to undermine Fallaci, who was influenced by her to the point of borrowing her term "Eurabia," rests on deliberately using charged phrases – Bat Ye'or's "conspiracy theory" about an "alleged" plan to "Islamise" Europe – that are designed to undermine trust in her judgment. If she can be painted as a conspiracy-theorizing kook, making up "alleged" plans, then what should we think of Oriana Fallaci, who relies on Bat Ye'or as an authority?

Oriana Fallaci was acutely aware of the changes being brought to Italy by those she called "the sons of Allah." And while she was in a state of alarm about the tens of millions of Muslims who had been so foolishly allowed, as she saw it, to settle in the very midst of Europe, her anxiety became rage, *la rabbia*, when she saw what was happening in her own country, Italy.

A few months before her death, Fallaci famously said she was ready to blow up the minaret of a mosque in Chianti [because she did not want to "see a 24-metre minaret in the landscape of Giotto when I can't even wear a cross ... in their country!"]

Even more than an Italian patriot, Fallaci was famously a Tuscan patriot. The prospect of a huge mosque and Islamic center being built in Colle Val d'Elsa, a small provincial town in the Italian countryside, very close to where she had her house in Tuscany, and where she would certainly have had to endure the muezzin's call to prayer five times a day (Fallaci could do a very good imitation of that guttural wail she found so unpleasant), sent her into a frenzy. For the Colle Val d'Elsa is not just any place, but quintessentially Tuscan, the embodiment of Tuscan-ness. What in god's name, Fallaci wondered, were Muslims doing in such an out-of-the-way place, living there and now wanting to erect a large mosque, costing nearly \$2 million. She understood: it was a way for

Muslims to plant their flag, to stake their claim, to Tuscany itself.

Magdi Allam is an Egyptian ex-Muslim who embraced Christianity, and in Italy became a journalist, both in print and on television, and the leader of his own anti-Islamic party, Io Amo l'Italia ("I Love Italy"). An ideological ally of Fallaci, Allam investigated the new mosque in Tuscany. He discovered that it was being funded by the municipality and a branch of the bank Monte Paschi di Siena, in a naïve attempt to make Muslims feel welcome. He further discovered connections between Feras Jabareen, the head of the Islamic community in Colle Val d'Elsa, who had carefully presented himself as a "moderate" to obtain funds for the mosque, but who turned out to be connected, through the UCOfII (Unione delle Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia), with the Muslim Brotherhood.

To understand Fallaci's rage over the placement of this mosque in rural Tuscany, Americans should imagine how they would feel if a large mosque, with minarets, were to be built fifty yards from the Old North Bridge in Concord, or the Battle Green in Lexington.

More than a decade later, her influence on Italian public life has strengthened.

The fact that Oriana Fallaci took such decisive positions after 9/11 transformed her into a figure of reference for the right," said Francesco Borgonovo, deputy director of the conservative newspaper La Verita.

He claimed that Fallaci was often criticised for warning Western governments against immigration from Muslim-majority countries, but she understood that "in the face of a certain Islam, it is dangerous to say hurray to multiculturalism."

Borgonovo is sympathetic to Fallaci's views, unsurprisingly.

What is surprising is that Al Jazeera allowed him to state her views both accurately and in apparent agreement, especially her understanding that “in the face of a certain Islam, it is dangerous to say hurray to multiculturalism.”

Before being revered by the Italian right, Fallaci was a respected war reporter, essayist and political interviewer.

And in all these undertakings, it didn't hurt that she was also beautiful.

“She was the most famous Italian journalist in the world,” said Ugo Tramballi, war correspondent and columnist for the newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore.

He said that while Italy had other prominent journalists, “none of them was known outside Italy and has had bylines on great American magazines as did Fallaci.”

Her interrogative interview style, in which she was vocal about her own opinions, contributed to her popularity.

“When Oriana Fallaci was going to follow the news, she became the news,” said Tramballi.

The daughter of an anti-fascist partisan, Fallaci wrote about the moon landing, interviewed Robert Kennedy and was injured during the repression of student movements in Mexico in 1968.

Some view Fallaci's early career, sometimes aligned with liberal causes, as distinct from her later days as an anti-Islam polemicist.

But Borgonovo, the conservative commentator, said they are two sides of the same coin: “The reasons behind her attacks against a certain kind of Islam were the same than [sic]those behind her previous battles. She was a feminist, a woman of the left and a libertarian.”

Leonardo Bianchi, news editor of Vice Italy, who wrote a book

about Italian populism, sees it differently.

According to him, after September 11, Fallaci became “a darling of the right precisely because she was a public figure previously associated with the left.”

She exemplified that “even ideologically unwholesome [!] people understand that the threat [of Islam] is serious and something needs to be done.”

Bianchi is right. Fallaci had such a long and distinguished career as a left-wing journalist that her anti-Islam ferocity made it possible for many on the Italian left to be anti-Islam as well. The anti-Islamic right could point to her as supporting their own views, and the policies on Islam that they promoted, which made it harder to paint those policies as “right-wing.” Had she been just one more “right-wing” voice against Islam, she would not have had the colossal impact she did have when her books denouncing Islam came out, and that ever since, even in death, she continues to have. Famously on the left for nearly her entire life, that left could not easily dismiss her.

After the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, Fallaci’s work resurfaced on social media platforms, with some arguing she was right to bemoan Islam after all.

Recently, social media savvy Salvini was photographed while reading one of her books on holiday.

And Facebook is now full of fans groups with names such as Oriana Fallaci, the power of truth and Aphorisms by Oriana Fallaci.

“Fallaci is no longer a simple journalist but has become, said Bianchi, “a prophetess of misfortune who warned us that Islam wanted to attack us.”

From beyond the grave, Fallaci is having a deep and salutary effect on Italian politics. Thirteen years after her death, the threat of Islam in Europe that she warned about becomes ever more apparent. Since her death, many more Muslims have been allowed into Europe, more than two million into Germany alone. But because of Fallaci's influence – her books on Islam have sold four million copies – there is a much wider understanding of the Muslim menace in Italy than in, for example, Germany or Sweden. And her influence has made it easier for Salvini to turn back all those boats full of migrants coming from Libya. It is not Pope Francis who is defending Christian Italy; he has turned out to be a simple-minded apologist and Defender of Islamic Faith who exhibits all the features of that “buonismo” which so enraged Fallaci. The stoutest defender of Christian Italy turns out to be the anticlerical atheist Oriana Fallaci.

Fallaci started to form her opinion of Islam in 1960, while on a world tour to research the status of women. “These veiled women are the unhappiest women in the world,” she wrote of her experience in Pakistan. “The wearer gazes out at the sky and her fellow man like a prisoner peering through the bars of her prison. This prison reaches from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, and includes Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia. It is the immense reign of Islam.” Fallaci later told friends that the Pakistani dictator Ali Bhutto cried when he told her he had been forced to marry his wife, a 23-year-old woman, when he was 15, and that Palestinian fighters in Lebanon refused to let Fallaci into a bomb shelter during a shelling, directing her instead to “a shed that turned out to be an explosives depot.”

In her novel *“Inshallah,”* published in 1990, after a stint covering fighting in Lebanon, one of the characters predicts that the next war wouldn't be between capitalists and communists but that future conflicts would be channeled

through religion – “between those who eat pig meat and those who don’t, those who drink wine and those who don’t, those who mumble Pater Noster and those who whisper Allah rassullillah.” Nothing has happened since in Europe to suggest that prediction is false.

Fallaci made many lapidary comments on Islam, Muslims, and Muslim leaders; none of them were reprinted in the Al Jazeera article, not because they are false, but because they are true. Here are a few:

The Muslims refuse our culture and try to impose their culture on us. I reject them, and this is not only my duty toward my culture-it is toward my values, my principles, my civilization.

The increased presence of Muslims in Italy and in Europe is directly proportional to our loss of freedom.

Europe is no longer Europe, it is Eurabia, a colony of Islam, where the Islamic invasion does not proceed only in a physical sense, but also in a mental and cultural sense.

Without Khomeini, we would not be where we are. What a pity that, when pregnant with him, his mother did not choose to have an abortion.

War is something Arafat sends others to do for him. That is, the poor souls who believe in him. This pompous incompetent caused the failure of the Camp David negotiations, Clinton’s mediation.

Arafat contradicts himself every five minutes. He always plays the double-cross, lies even if you ask him what time it is.

She was a steadfast supporter of Israel – a convinced Zionist – and deplored the rise in antisemitism, connected to the large Muslim presence that had re-infected Europe with that

mental disease:

I am disgusted by the anti-Semitism of many Italians, of many Europeans.

I find it shameful that in nearly all the universities of Europe, Palestinian students sponsor and nurture anti-Semitism.

I defend Israel's right to exist, to defend themselves, to not let themselves be exterminated a second time.

The Muslim migrants in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, when without a mosque nearby, would hold their prayer sessions in the middle of city streets, blocking traffic, in complete disregard of the laws or the well-being of the Infidels. That was maddening enough. But what infuriated Fallaci even more were the Muslim migrants who urinated on Renaissance masterpieces, and defecated just outside, or even inside, venerable churches – a most nauseating way to show their contempt for Christians. She more than once mentioned the Muslim Somalis who in Florence urinated against Lorenzo Ghiberti's east doors of the Baptistery – a masterpiece, described by an admiring Michelangelo as the "Gates of Heaven" – their yellow streams flowing down those fabulous doors for which the Somalis had no interest or respect; after all, these were created by and for "the most vile of created beings." Why should Muslims care about damaging "Christian" doors in a Christian building?

Fallaci begins *The Rage and the Pride* with a note to Ferruccio de Bortoli, the then-editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, in whose pages her book first appeared. A few paragraphs provide a telling example of her lucid, angry prose:

I don't go pitching tents at Mecca. I don't go singing Our Fathers and Hail Marys in front of Mohammed's tomb. I don't go peeing on the marble of their mosques; I don't go shitting

at the feet of their minarets. When I find myself in their countries (something from which I never derive pleasure), I never forget that I am a guest and a foreigner. I am careful not to offend them with clothing or gestures or behavior that are normal for us but impermissible to them. I treat them with dutiful respect, dutiful courtesy, and I excuse myself when through mistake or ignorance I infringe some rule or superstition of theirs. And the images I've had before my eyes while writing this scream of pain and indignation haven't always been those of the apocalyptic scenes I started with. Sometimes I see another image instead, a symbolic (and therefore infuriating) one: the huge tent with which the Somalian Muslims disfigured and befouled and profaned the Piazza del Duomo at Florence for three months last summer. My city.

A tent put up in order to beg-condemn-insult the Italian government that hosted them but wouldn't give them the papers necessary to rove about Europe and wouldn't let them bring the hordes of their relatives to Italy. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, pregnant sisters-in-law, and if they had their way, their relatives' relatives as well. A tent situated next to the beautiful palazzo of the Archbishop on whose sidewalk they kept the shoes or sandals that are lined up outside the mosques in their countries. And along with the shoes or sandals, the empty bottles of water they'd used to wash their feet before praying. A tent placed in front of the cathedral with Brunelleschi's cupola and by the side of the Baptistry with Ghiberti's golden doors. A tent, finally, furnished like a sleazy little apartment: seats, tables, chaise-lounges, mattresses for sleeping and for fucking, ovens for cooking food and plaguing the piazza with smoke and stench. And, thanks to the customary irresponsibility of ENEL, which cares about our works of art about as much as it cares about our landscape, furnished with electric light. Thanks to a radio tape player, enriched by the uncouth wailing of a muezzin who punctually exhorted the

faithful, deafened the infidels, and smothered the sound of the church bells. Add to all this the yellow streaks of urine that profaned the marble of the Baptistry. (My, these sons of Allah sure have a long range! However did they manage to hit the target when they were held back by a protective railing that kept it nearly two whole meters away from their urinary equipment?) And along with the yellow streaks of urine, the stench of the excrement that blocked the door of San Salvatore al Vescovo: that exquisite Romanesque church (year 1000) that stands at the rear of the Piazza del Duomo and that the sons of Allah transformed into a shithouse. You're well aware of this.

Her vivid rage against the Muslim invaders is one part of the book; the other part describes her pride in Western, Italian, Tuscan civilization.. Hence the title: *The Rage and the Pride*.

Now she is regarded as “prescient” in her Cassandra-like warnings about Islam in Europe. Cometh the hour, cometh the woman. No one would be more unhappy to learn that she was right all along about Islam than that marvelous phenomenon of intelligence, wit, humor, truth, and deep melancholy, Oriana Fallaci.

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