



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

Nightmare in Beit Hanoun How Gaza Offends Us All

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Information Clearing House
13 February 2007

AN OPENED JAW with yellowed teeth gaped out of its bloodied shroud. The rest of the head parts were wrapped in a plastic bag placed atop the jaw and nostrils, as if to be close to the face to which it once belonged. The bag was red from the pieces stuffed inside it. Below the jaw was a human neck slit open midway down: a fleshy, wet wound smiling pink and oozing out from the browned skin around it, the neck still linked to the body below it. Above him, in the morgue's upper freezer, lay a dead woman, her red hennaed hair visible for the first time to strange men around her. More red plastic wrapped around an otherwise absent chin. She was dead because she demonstrated outside a mosque in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza, where more than 60 men sheltered during the artillery onslaught by Israeli tanks and cannons.

Most of the other bodies still had their faces intact. They lay on their silver morgue trays stiffly as unthawed frozen food. One man wore a green Hamas headband; he looked like a gentle shepherd from some forgotten, pastoral age. Another's white eyes were partially opened,

looking out in horror as if he'd died seeing it coming. Then a muddy, grizzled blob on the bottom left tray, black curls tangled and damped into its rounded head and blessedly shut eyes. A closer look revealed a child, a boy of 4: Majed, out playing his important childhood games when death came in like thunder and rolled him up in a million speckles of black mud. The other dead had already been taken away.

Muslim burials take place quickly - a godsend to the doctors, nurses and undertakers who, at Gaza's hospitals and morgues, desperately need the space for the next batch of casualties who would sleep on the same sheets, same steel-framed beds, in the same humid heat, in the same close, crowded, grief-stricken rooms, often on the floors, with the same tired, unpaid attendants making their rounds without the proper supplies to help them if they were still alive. And some would die on the operating table, like the young man gone now to the Kamal Adwan hospital morgue when his wounds became too much for his body to bear. Two young girls preceded him earlier the same day. Blessed are they who leave this human wasteland washed and shrouded for a quiet, earthy grave.

On this day the hospitals will be filled beyond capacity again, when the 18 civilians killed in a pre-dawn attack on Beit Hanoun - women, men and children blasted out of their sleep into human chunks - are rolled out of the ambulances and into the freezers of Shifa or Kamal Adwan hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip. How dare they sleep in their houses at night when the tanks are barking out commands?

Is it possible to believe this was an accident? that an international investigation will ever take place - like after Jenin? like after Dan Halutz dropped his 2,000 pound bomb on an apartment building in Gaza City, killing 15 people, nine of them women and children? like after the siege of Jabalya in the fall of 2004? like after Operation Rainbow in Rafah? like after Huda Ghalia's family was blasted into nothingness during an outing on a Gaza beach? Will American eyes, glued to their glaucous TV screens to find out which celebrity marriage is kaput or who the starting quarterback will be on Sunday, ever know that another massacre of Palestinians took place?

At Shifa hospital, Gaza's central hospital, Dr. Juma' Saqa and his staff cope with the daily shortages of supplies from kidney dialysis machines

to fans and clean linens. Cancer medications are unavailable to the growing number of cancer patients, and elective surgeries, such as for hernias or tonsils, are a thing of the past. This is where doctors and nurses witness how the water that Gazans drink causes innumerable ailments - rotting teeth, anemia in children and kidney dysfunction - because of its brackish, poisonous quality. This is where children lie half-naked in their beds, white tape across their noses holding tubes to their faces so that they may eat or breathe - like Ahmad, aged 3, also from Beit Hanoun, who took a bullet in the right side of his belly that exited on the left. His mother stands over him passively, grateful. Ahmad, at least, is going to live. But for what?

Each night in Gaza City that first week of November, explosions sounded from the northeastern corner of Gaza: a succession of bullets, booms, bombs, canon fire. On the first night of the onslaught we could still see lights from Beit Hanoun, 10 miles from us, blinking and twinkling as if nothing were really happening; it was all a dream - fireworks, a distant celebration, perhaps. But by the second night a swath of blacked-out space hid any evidence of Beit Hanoun, electricity-less and water-less as the booms continued unabated for an hour or more, and the hum of the pilot-less drones circled round again and again above us - above Beit Hanoun, above Gaza - automated people-monitors taking stock of the activity below. Nobody from Beit Hanoun could leave by day to get to work without announcing to the tanks and the drones that, for a semblance of normalcy, he was prepared to sacrifice his life. All men between the ages of 16 and 35 were rounded up onto trucks and hauled away for “questioning”. What will happen to them and their families? Will anyone follow up? Will they add to the 10,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, left to rot while their wives and children, sisters, brothers, parents go on struggling to survive?

Gaza Disintegrating

There lies Gaza, stretched 28 miles long, in a tumbledown graying, decaying heap, yawning, tired, wretched, full of garbage. Tape gauze over your nose to avoid the smell of sewage and burning trash. Try not to notice the metal-shuttered shop fronts, the empty stores, the proliferation of horse- and donkey-carts clapping along the streets for lack of fuel, the ribs of the tired beasts jutting out from their bellies as

boys whip them along to keep going. The joke is the cerulean blue sky illuminating the rubbish tip, the palm trees and purple flowers beaming in the November sun - natural non-sequiturs, like the box of fresh chocolates offered to the journalists filming the woman's wounded son as she yells out her frustrations and horror at the Americans and the Israelis who are killing her family. Why? She asks. Why, why, why?

Ask Mark Regev, Israel's eager, hideously sincere government spokesperson. On CNN's international news he tells us in earnest that this is Israeli self-defense. The Qassam fire into Sderot and Ashkelon must stop. Israelis have the right to defend themselves. The "operation" in Beit Hanoun will not stop until the Qassams stop. Each word drivels out of his mouth into a bubble of obscenity for everyone watching from the vantage point of Gaza. Verbal pornography, sado-masochistic jargon from the prince of Hasbara leaks onto the dust like poisonous bile bought, paid for and sought after by the lords of power and their occupying machinery.

The shoddy, homemade Qassams hiss like cornered alley cats when they are fired into the skies. Stupid and bestial, they zing across the border like crazed beasts not knowing where they are going. They'll dash forever like this until the occupation of Palestine ends. The Gazans know this, Hamas knows it, Fatah knows it, the PFLP knows it. In Israel, Labor and Likud know it, Meretz knows it, Yisrael Beiteinu knows it, Shas knows it; Peretz, Olmert and Lieberman know it, Sharon knew it, the Israeli people know it, official America know this. So, 40 years after 1967 and 58 years after 1948, why is the occupation not yet over?

Because Israel does not want it to end. Because Israel wants the land and the resources without the people. Because you have to eviscerate a culture in order to maintain total control over it. Because the United States says that's just fine with us, you serve our purpose well. You help make the war on terror convenient. You help fit Iraq into the scheme. You'll help us with Iran as well. Who the hell cares about a million and a half poverty-stricken Gazans and their dust, their sand, their stinking, crumbling heap of a disaster area homeland?

What a terrible shame it is that Gazans have not yet attained the status of human in the eyes of the Western powers, for the resistance there

will continue to be an enigma until this changes. For now, however, the slaughter will continue unabated.

Leaving Gaza at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday morning, Nov. 4, 2006, I hear a loud explosion. My cab driver picks me up and we drive down the main street in Gaza City toward Erez. Suddenly, unexpectedly, there is a smoldering mass of wreckage in front of me, a car surrounded by boys picking at its still-hot exterior. Inside are four blackened, seared human shapes, crispy at the touch, faceless from the burns, charcoal, shreds of steaming cloth, a smell of barbecued human flesh, sirens in the distance. Burnt and vaporized metal looks like what you see in a science fiction movie. Burnt humans look like singed papier maché monsters whose pieces fall off at the hint of a breeze.

Gaza is sorry for these indiscretions, this poor taste, this unseemly topic of conversation. You are right to express your indignation. How Dare Gaza Speak of These Things!?! But it can no longer contain its secrets even with the blockade of visitors to its vile shores; its voice is shrill even when sublimated through the layers of media deceit. The smoke rises higher in the skies each time. The prison is imploding and the resistance will never end.

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