

VIURE, MORIR I NÀIXER A

GAZA

DAVID SEGARRA



SEMBRA
LLIBRES



EDICIÓ NO VENAL

Traducció dels textos del llibre:

Viure, morir i nèixer a Gaza

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HAYAT. Life.

SABR. Patience. Perseverance.

SHUKR. Gratitude.

GAZA IN A DAY (PAGE 7)

Nighttime in the Mediterranean. It is raining. Not everyone is sleeping. Someone is setting off fireworks next to the port. Some areas of the city are dark due to the power outage. A mother is losing a child and is giving birth to another almost at the same time. Unmanned planes are watching from the sky. People killed and injured under the bombs. The F-16 fighter aircrafts and the Apache helicopters are looking for human objectives. People killed and injured under the bombs. The tanks are shooting projectiles against a funeral. The soldiers are running away frightened. An Israeli armoured gets the impact. Resistance is pointing from a ruined house. The day starts in the Mediterranean.

All this has happened today in Gaza, Palestine.

And life goes on.

BIRTH OF A BOOK (PAGE 9)

This is a book that was not meant to exist. A book that started unwittingly. A photography book with no camera and with no photographer.

But, how is it possible not to be born when the seed has already been planted?

The conflict in Palestine has accompanied all of us who come from the Mediterranean throughout our lives. We have grown up with the images of horror. Year after year. Unresolved. The first thing I remember is 1987. I was eleven and I saw on television how a group of soldiers was using rocks to break arms, elbows and muscles to children of my age. There was no need to be an expert. Any eleven-year-old child perfectly understands the evil behind an adult breaking a child's body. I would learn later that those images responded to a political decision which had been coldly studied. Counter-insurgency techniques, containment and control of the enemy population. Later I would also learn that the children I saw were not the only ones to suffer it. That it did not only happen in Palestine. That conquerors do this kind of things to their conquered. That we also experienced that in 1707 and 1939.

This book's journey started, unintentionally, after Operation Cast Lead, when Israel attacked Gaza in 2009. In 2009 I started to learn what resilience is: the capacity to survive, to not surrender, to face adversity, to fight. The art of getting stronger and positively transformed from conflicts and difficulties. In Palestine, each impact is explained and understood from absolutely living faith and tradition. And each killed, injured, orphaned and widowed is honoured and cared for by the community. Between trauma and sadness, the joy of living and confidence are found. Resilience, then, could be the modern approach to describe the essence of the miracle of the persistence of human life.

There is a story that, in my opinion, perfectly embodies the meaning of resilience. During 2009 bombings, the small Gaza zoo witnessed how their animals died: lions,

PROLOGUE

monkeys and birds. Some affected by the bombs, some others by hunger. When the attack ended, the zoo owners found death and destruction under the ruins. Father and son sat down to think. The blockade did not allow them to bring new animals. And in the Strip there are only dogs, cats, pigeons, hens, horses and donkeys. Yes, donkeys. They took some of these animals. In Gaza they are called *Abu Sabr* - that is, the most patient, the father of patience. They used hair dye to paint them white with black stripes, and they cut the mane into a brush shape. This is how the zebras of Gaza were born. And when the zoo opened its doors again, Gaza children were astonished. Innocents as they are, they travelled outside Gaza. To the African savannah, to the Arabian desert. To the real and the imaginary world. Free. Happy. In peace. Like in Benigni's *Life is beautiful*, in Palestine adults protect their children. Truth always surpasses fiction. At that point I thought that we could learn a lot from these zebras, from this story and what it represents. And, then, I started the project to film a documentary called *The zebras of Gaza*, an audiovisual work to show stories of resistance and resilience that take place in Palestine.

In 2010 I join the Freedom Flotilla. Nine ships carry seven-hundred activists and journalists on board from fifty nations, as well as 10,000 tones of humanitarian aid. I board with the support of Venezuelan television channels. Jews, Muslims, Christians, Kurds and Turks, people from all around the world, converge. United. Laura Arnau, activist and journalist that was part of the Flotilla describes it as a new Noah's ark. The objectives are to break the sea blockade to Gaza and to bring aid: healthcare, educational and building materials for the reconstruction. We know we are at risk. But we cannot imagine to what extreme. At dawn, the 31st of May, all the strength of the Israeli navy is on us. The survivors are kidnapped in international waters and taken to a high security prison in the middle of the Neguev desert. Ironically, in front of Gaza and surrounded by Bedouin Palestinian villages. The story of the zebras will have to wait. It is the time to explain the story of the Flotilla. Thus, a year later, we release the documentary *Fire over the Marmara*.

Four years later, in 2014, I join a group of activists and journalists that work on the protection of Palestinian farmers from the daily attack of soldiers. I spend three months in Gaza. A few days under the bombings. My objective is to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the Strip and to look for stories for the documentary *The Zebras of Gaza*. I have no camera and no computer. I do not want any distractions. I want to focus on life and on reality. Books and notebooks are my companions. But Manu Pineda, one of the initiators of Unidakum brigades has a Nikon. And I ask for it. Only one of the lenses works: it is a telephoto lens that allows me, and forces me, to get close to reality from the distance. I am not a photographer, but without even realising, I gather thousands of photographs of Gaza's daily life. I meet people and I live beautiful experiences. And, at the end, I meet the father and the son who painted the donkeys as zebras. A few days later, the bombings start. The story of the zebras is shelved again.

When I get back to Valencia, thinking about the people I have left in Gaza, I ask myself what I can do. The idea arises talking with Xavi Sarrià: let's make a book. Yes. Let's do it. Let's share the stories. They deserve to be told. Let's make a photography book without a photographer. Let's make a book like they made a zebra without zebras.

What we have seen, and what we are trying to learn, is the art, the capacity to create beauty and order from horror and chaos. In a time of fall like this we need to listen and to think. Even to remember. Because we, in our lands, have also been like that. Because we have also been able to stand up. This is why this book is not only about Gaza; this book is about the possibility to be ourselves. And to remind ourselves that the most ferocious battle is not against the external enemy, but against the evil that lives in us, that corrupts and colonizes us from the inside. Without an internal liberation that improves and elevates us, every external and material liberation is condemned to fail. This is what Palestine has taught me and what I want to share with you.

DAVID SEGARRA SOLER
Bétera, 2014.



THREE ATTEMPTS TO ENTER GAZA (PAGE 18)

Winter 2009. A year after Operation Cast Lead I am able to enter the Gaza Strip. I come from Caracas, Venezuela, with two colleagues: Vicent, the Valencian; and Vivianna, the Venezuelan. They are not able to enter. And, even though they try to through the smugglers' routes of the Sinai, they do not manage to. New Year's Eve in Gaza. I meet people from all around the world. Many are Jewish. 72 hours later, Mubarak's Egyptian regime forces us to leave. We three meet again in Cairo. From there we travel towards Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Aida refugee camp. We learn there a new arabic word: *Hayat*. It is the name of an orphan girl and it means 'life'.

Spring 2010. I try it again with the Mavi Marmara and the Freedom Flotilla. We leave from Istanbul, Turkey, with hundreds of people from all over the planet. Early morning, in the middle of the sea, we are attacked by Israeli elite forces. Ten people die. Among them, the journalist Cevdet Kiliçlar. We do not make it to Gaza. We get stuck at the Israeli port of Ashdod. From the Mediterranean to the Negev. We are in incommunicado detention and isolated at Ber Sheeba prison for three days. We are deported and forbidden the entrance to the State of Israel for ten years. It is, therefore, forbidden to go back to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Aida and all the West Bank.

Four years later I go back to Cairo. Two weeks of waiting and I enter again Gaza. It feels as if this was the first time. I live three months among orchards, fig, orange and olive trees. Three spring months. Three long months. A hundred days. Like the previous trips, I keep doing research with a documentary film about the life and resistance of Palestinians in mind. I spend a week under the bombs before I come back to Valencia. To be with my family. To write this book. And to prepare the return.

THE CLOSED SEA (PAGE 24)

During the months I stay in Gaza I keep hearing stories about fishermen. They are attacked every week from the warships that enclose the sea. Gaza is an oasis surrounded by the Negev and the Sinai deserts. Just in front of it, the Mediterranean.

The Palestinian ports of the Strip are tiny. It has been more than half a century since the last foreigner ship docked. And Palestinian boats do not leave them either. The Israeli military authorities impose a fishing limit. Depending on the negotiations, it can extend to ten kilometers or reduce up to three. Depending on the strategy of the colonizers, more or less fish capture is allowed.

The fishermen tell me, before the last military escalation, that only about a hundred boats, out of four thousand, are leaving due to the daily attacks. They also tell stories of dozens of stolen boats and hundreds of fishermen captured and imprisoned. When they show me the boats cementery I realize they do not need an autopsy. The impact of the projectiles is obvious. Also the scars. Many did not die at the first attack and they could rescue them to live more lives.

But nothing impedes Mohamed the boxer and the beach guards to invite us to eat fish.

THE INJURED LAND (PAGE 32)

The first place in Gaza that I get to know is Khuza'a and its cultivated lands, which extend at the south-west of the Strip. Behind, the orchards and the citrus fruit trees. Here, the dry land and grains. Just facing, the border with the State of Israel.

Unadikun brigades come here every day during harvesting time. From Malaga, La Guaira, Madrid, Paris, Lleida, Alcoi, Muro and Valencia. They come to act as human shields. When they are not there, army snipers shoot at the farmers. They are injured and, sometimes, killed. Even when the international volunteers are clearly identified, the soldiers open fire. But the strategy of the brigades is a success. They only fire in the air and to the floor. Sometimes, a few metres from the feet. But the crop is harvested. With sickle and by hand. The land gives birth, again. Operation Protective Edge will destroy everything in 2014. The cycle of death and life is renovated. Among the footprints of the tanks, women and men go back to till the land and they get plants to sprout. And the ants keep running along the underground tunnels.

It is estimated that, since 1948, the State of Israel has uprooted a million fig, lemon, orange and olive trees in Palestine. I cannot avoid remembering the Punta orchard in Valencia, which was also devastated by the force. And a song comes to my mind: Dad, the field is not the field anymore. Dad, tomorrow, the sky will cry blood. The wind sings it in tears. Dad, they have arrived. Flesh monsters with iron worms. Dad, no, don't be afraid, and say no, because I am waiting for you. Dad, they are killing the land. Dad, stop crying because they have declared the war on us.

THE CONQUEST (PAGE 36)

Not much is known about the slow and subtle colonization process of the Palestinian lands. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and in order to be able to sell and buy the land, the Ottoman and British Empires introduced and imposed the census, the private property and the state structure. These did not exist in traditional society. European Zionists benefited from this new legal framework to start buying lands. It is estimated that about 80 and 90% of the land they bought belonged to Palestinian rich landowners. The peasants, who were most of the population, had to face the power of five great enemies: two empires, Zionism, the Arab regimes and the local elites.

One must remember that in the 19th century, the Palestinian population was about 5% Jewish, 10% Christian and 85% Muslim. From the 19th century, the Jewish property in Palestinian land grew from 1 to 3% and it got to 7% in 1948. In the 20th century, the British State owned almost half of the territory, and the Palestinians retained the other half. But after 1948 war, the new State of Israel conquered by the arms the 78% of Palestine and expelled more than 700,000 natives. In 1962, and according to the laws created with this aim, the Zionist state already controlled around 90 or 95% of the land inside its first borders. The Palestinians kept a 5% of these lands. In 1967, Israel invaded Gaza and the West Bank and conquered the 100% of Palestine. Half a million of new settlers established in the new occupied lands.

In 2005, the economic cost and the pressure of the resistance led to the withdrawal of Israeli settlers from Gaza. The following year, the longest and more massive siege in history against the tiny Strip started.

THE COMMUNITY (PAGE 38)

As in the rest of the world, up to the beginning of the 20th century, most of the Palestinian population lived off the land. And with the land. In a way that did not differ much from how they had done for centuries. Or maybe for thousands of years.

What we have been hidden about Palestine, and about our own homeland, is that not all the lands were owned by feudal lords and big landowners. The communal, the common, the community land, were the norm. Peasant, collectivity and people have historically been synonyms. Also citizen, owner and bourgeois. This is why the rural majorities fiercely opposed to the expansion of the central government of cities. The State, the Monarchy or the Republic ment taxes, military service, war and control. By force of arms and laws, modernization was imposed to peoples.

In Palestine, the joint property system is called Musha or Mesha'a. Its ancestral norms aim at keeping the integrity of the land, the unity of the community and the equality in the distribution of the land. It prevents and discourages the selling and buying of land and intensive and individualistic exploitation. This system aims at providing stability and sustainability. Like Valencian Horta. Like the Valencian Water Tribunal. From the first day, the Ottoman, British and Israeli conquerors declared the war against joint property. And they forbid it with the enthusiastic collaboration of small local elites, both rural and urban. This clash against the powerful will be the root of the Palestinian resistance. Of the people of the land.

Today, what is left from that spirit of the land is a silenced mystery. But in the collective and ancestral memory of Palestine, and in our people's memory, the land has a communal origin. And sacred. The land belongs to all of us. It is the mother and the womb.

ONE GOD FOR ALL (PAGE 52)

Palestine is the Holy Land for all Abrahamic faiths. Here, Samaritans, Jews, Christians, Muslims and Druze have lived for thousands of years. All these religions have their origins in Abraham and follow a lineage that continues with Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Prophets that come, one after the other, to renovate a simple message: there is no other God than God. No pharaon, no caesar, no king, not even the prophets, can rival the only true reality. With the essence of Everything. The Creator of Creation.

However, the human being, fallen from Paradise, quickly forgets. And we have killed and oppressed each other falsely on behalf of God, of emperors, of caliphs, of vengeance, of conquests, of progresses and of revolutions. But this is not what I have seen in Palestine. It is in Gaza where I have broadened my knowledge on traditional Christianity. Ibrahim opened the church of Saint Porphyrius for me and I assisted there to a mass that lasted for five hours among icons, incense and Gregorian chants. The atmosphere reminded me of the essence. The origin could be felt closer. Maybe like in old Romanesque churches. With Ibrahim I visited the neighbouring Al-Omari Mosque, where Basel, the Bedouin friend, was praying. He proudly told me how a Samaritan, ancestral faith linked to Judaism, was one of the Palestinian prominent political prisoners. This book includes a poem by Al-Qasim, a national Palestinian poet of Druze religion. In 2009, in Gaza, I met for the very first time religious Jewish people. They were there to support Palestine. Ordinary Palestinians revered these wise men. People of the Book.

The seed of evil is not in the other, in the difference. It is in each one of us. Restraining darkness and leaning towards light is essential. It is each individual's and each generation's responsibility. From Eve, Adam, Noah, Abel and Cain, we keep loosing this cosmic combat. But to keep loosing does not mean having lost.

IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE (PAGE 60)

When conquerors conquer, the first they try to do is to erase memory. Identity is the spiritual root of the people. It is their way of being and being in the world. In the State of Israel there are still a million and a half Palestinians who are educated according to Zionist educational planning. A study conducted by the Arabic Cultural Association found more than 16,225 mistakes in the Arab textbooks imposed by the authorities. It is no coincidence. At the same time, politicians discussed about reducing the teaching of the Arabic language. The supremacy of Hebrew is absolute. Palestinian students are denied their history and their identity while they are distanced from their Gaza and West Bank brothers and sisters. Palestine does not exist. Palestinians do not exist. They have never existed and never will. They call them arab-israelis. Speaking Arabic means suspicions, detentions, poverty. Speaking Hebrew is speaking the language of the masters, of the powerful, of the victors. Hundreds of villages were erased from the map and their Arab names were replaced by Hebrew's. The director of the state train company even forbids the stops announcements to be pronounced in Arabic. He says that Hebrew and English are enough. To include Arabic "would make the journey too noisy". For 67 years now, Jewish students arrived from all over the world are taught to hate Arabs. A study by The Hebrew University of Jerusalem analyzed hundreds of textbooks and did not find a single image in which Arabs were depicted as "normal people". Of course, explaining the history of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe, is persecuted. The old will die and the young will not remember, the conquerors say again and again.

And we should not be surprised. Up until I was 18 I knew nothing about my own history, that of the Crown of Aragon, of the Valencian Reigns (the Islamic and the Christian), of Baptista Basset, of maulets and botiflers, of the burning of Xàtiva in 1707, of the assault on Barcelona in 1714, of the prohibition of our laws and customs. Or about the three centuries of persecution of our valencian-catalan language. Actually, I started to speak it and to write it when I was an adult. And if I have been able to learn it, it is thanks to those who, for three centuries, protected and transmitted the treasure of our memory in farmhouses, in villages, in families and on books.

OMAR AL-MUKHTAR STREET'S MECHANIC (PAGE 64)

The best way to get around Gaza is by motorbike. Most people do not agree. They tell me it is crazy. But the use of the motorbike inexorably increases. Its low fuel consumption and its agility make it perfect to go around the 45 kilometers of a strip of land which is almost flat. Therefore, I buy a Dayun 40 that has arrived in Palestine from China through the tunnels. The quality, of course, leaves a bit to be desired.

A few days later, the clutch cable breaks. A friend and I are lost in the middle of the city. Some young men show us the way to a mechanic shop at Omar al-Mukhtar street. Abu Hassan welcomes us there. The shop is tiny, dark and full of boxes and tools. Abu interrupts what he is doing and takes care of our motorbike at the street. He speaks with my friend, who is a French-Tunisian citizen. "Where is the world?" "Where are the Muslims?" Abu asks. "Why have they forgotten Palestine?" In a few minutes, the cable is repaired. He charges us ten shekels. Two euros.

I come back twice to have the oil changed and a flat tyre repaired. He does not charge me now. Nothing. I insist, embarrassed. But, there is no way. I keep insisting until he takes a worn leather wallet out of his pocket. With it in his hands he says to me: "Don't worry; if you have any money problem, you can come here and I will help you. No problem." He, who is imprisoned in Gaza and with hardly any opportunity, is offering me his help.

I leave looking to the ground. And to the sky. I say good bye from the motorbike. What can I say? What can I add? I leave thinking: "We'll see each other again".

THE CAT THAT HAD TO DIE (PAGE 72)

The telephone rings in the apartment where I live close to the port. It seems that there has been an attack by an unmanned plane. We walk to Shifa hospital to find out if there is anyone killed or injured. When we get there, the efforts and the discussions to get information from the doctors start. Finally, it turns out to be a false alarm.

Some colleagues are smoking and others are trying to make an old machine serve them a coffee. We hear a meow. We find a little orange cat on the floor. I kneel to caress it. I discover, with horror, that it has a broken leg. It does not walk, it crawls. We are all affected. A car might have run over it. We ask the doctors if it can be cured. They tell us that they can hardly assist people. We even ask if they can euthanize it. It will not survive and will starve. We are told that the little they have is for people. Just then, a young man approaches us, curious. He is smiling. And he has no leg. He explains us that a few years earlier an Apache helicopter attacked his house and killed his brother. But he is here. Talking to us. And smiling. Someone takes the cat, puts it into a box and caresses it. They walk back slowly and silently. They do not go back home, but towards the port. They continue the line of the beach and they arrive, across the rocks, to the furthest dock. The sea and the sky are black. Very black. There are no stars. The cat is caressed with all the possible love. And, in an infinite instant, the cat, innocent, joins the sea forever.

The following day, many cats, the same orange colour, show up in the street. The children from the shop give them water to drink.

BABEL (PAGE 84)

Many many years ago, in the vibrant city of Babylon, a huge tower was built. It was the pride of power and of the science of Man against Nature and God. The Jews, then a nomad people without land, considered this tower to be a reflection of the arrogance of the nascent civilisation. And they called it Babel.

In the Gaza Strip, modern Israel is showing Palestinians its face at the borders that imprison them.

In the North, in front of Beit Lahya, Rutenberg thermal power station stands imposing. Here, coal is transformed into electricity. Behind, the city of Asqalan. This really old Canaanite village was inhabited in 1948 by 11,000 Palestinians, Muslims and Christians. When the Israeli troops arrived, its citizens were confined in a ghetto until they were deported to Gaza. For decades, Jewish immigrants from all over the world have settled in the new city, rebaptized Ashkelon. Today, it is one of the most polluted Israeli cities in one of the world's most polluting countries.

In the East, in front of the extense cereal fields, the barriers. Separated by some meters, there are remote-control surveillance towers. The cameras and the movement sensors allow the operators to point the machine guns towards human objectives. Every day, armored cars, military vehicles and trucks routinely go into the Palestinian fields to mow the grass. That is, to prevent the trees and plants from growing. Security issues, they say. Palestinians could hide among them, they justify themselves. A few meters away from the fence, the Israeli agroindustry uses planes to spray with pesticides the extensive single-crop fields. By land, sea and air, all kind of robotic vehicles keep an eye on the native population.

But the story tells us that the tower of Babel falls down.

DIVIDE ET IMPERA (PAGE 88)

Divide to reign. The conquerors know that the most effective way to dominate and to dilute the conquered is to sow division and dissent between them. This maxim is attributed to the Macedonians, but it was the Romans who put it into practice in all the Mediterranean. French, Britons and Spaniards have mastered division. Many of the current fratricide wars in Africa and Asia have their origin in the unbalance generated by the British and French empires. The Castilian Reign is responsible for the conquest, fragmentation and extermination of hundreds of indigenous nations in Latin America. Also for the desintegration of Al-Andalus and of the Crown of Aragon.

Palestine is currently divided into many fragments. There is the State of Israel, where a million and a half Palestinians live. There is Jerusalem, where three hundred thousand of them resist. There is the West Bank, with another two million and a half. There is Gaza, with almost two million. And there is also the diaspora, which accounts for about eight million people. They are mainly in Jordan, Lebanon, Siria and Chile. The Palestinians are, according to the estimations, between eleven and fourteen million people. The State of Israel has created a legal network to control, fragment and divide the conquered. The millions of Palestinians living abroad cannot visit Israel, let alone live there. Neither the West Bank, Jerusalem or Gaza. The Palestinians from Gaza cannot visit the West Bank or Jerusalem. The Palestinians from the West Bank cannot go to Gaza. Therefore, they cannot marry, study or work together. If, for instance, a Palestinian from Jerusalem falls in love with a Palestinian from Bethlehem and gets married, one would lose the right to live and to go back to his or her own city. Families, lands, villages, stories and loves separated by walls and soldiers. The Israeli Government imposes five hierarchical identities in its apartheid system. From top to bottom: Israeli Jews, Palestinians from Israel, Palestinians from Jerusalem, Palestinians from the West Bank and Palestinians from Gaza. Each group, in descending order, has more restrictions and less rights. Future is uncertain; but what we can be certain about is the fact that, despite the huge obstacles, Palestinians are still Palestinians.

THE MOTHER (PAGE 94)

Every Monday, relatives of the political and war prisoners gather in front of the International Red Cross building. Mothers, wives, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends and activists. They are on hunger strike in solidarity with their people. I am attracted by the face of a woman. She looks at me. I take a photo of her. She smiles and I greet her with respect. A few months later I will get to know her story.

Rihab Kanaan's family fled from Palestine. She was born in Lebanon, in Al-Zaatar (Thyme) refugee camp. She married when she was very young and she moved to Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. During the Lebanese civil war, these two camps suffered the worst massacres in the history of Palestine. Between 2,000 and 6,000 civilians were exterminated by the Lebanese phalanx with the support of the Israeli troops, led by Ariel Sharon. Hundreds of children were killed and many women were raped and murdered. The mutilations and the horrors that the journalists and diplomats found there are too terrible to have them written.

Fifty members of her family died. Including her husband. Her daughter disappeared. Rihab married again and emigrated to Tunisia. There, she became an important poet. In 1995 she went back to Palestine, to the Gaza Strip. Five years later, a survivor from Lebanon told her that her daughter was still alive. A few months later, she received a phone call: "Mum, it's me. Maymana". She had not died. She had survived and the neighbours had reared her. That same year 2000, the Lebanese resistance expelled the Zionist and the Phalangist armies. Mother and daughter decided to meet at the border. Maymana waited for her mother day after day while she saw how other families got together after half a century of separation. But her mother did not appear. Rihab did not arrive. The authorities did not give her the authorisation. She had to wait for another two years, when a Gaza journalist discovered Rihab's story and managed to organize, with a television channel, the meeting in the United Arab Emirates. Finally, after 24 years apart, mother and daughter were together again. Maymana said: "Now I believe in miracles and hope. I have finally found the love of a mother".

But the occupation continues, and mother and daughter are still living apart, in Gaza and Beirut. They have only been able to meet again a second time.

IMPRISON PERSEVERANCE (PAGE 96)

As days pass, I make some friends in Gaza. Most of them, journalists and artists. I also meet their friends from Jabalia, Bureij and Rafah. Many are around the age of forty. While calmly chatting they point out to one of them: "He has been in prison for twenty years". He must be two or three years older than me. "That one over there, for seventeen years", "the other, five years". "And I, four", my friend says to me. I look at them again. One after the other. Nobody could imagine what they have lived through. But something is obvious: they have not finished them off. They have not been able to break them down.

Since the total occupation of Palestine, in 1976, 800,000 Palestinians are estimated to have been arrested or imprisoned. Nowadays, there are more than five thousand Palestinians in the jails of the State of Israel. There are prisoners of war, the guerrillas; there are political prisoners, activists, journalists and intellectuals locked up because of their opinions; there are prisoners without charges, the so called administrative prisoners, about two hundred people arrested for being potentially dangerous; and there are also other two hundred minors. Every year, almost a thousand minors are prosecuted by the military judicial system. Even hundreds of human rights defenders and dozens of parliament members have been arrested and imprisoned. Israel is one of the few countries to have legalized torture. They do define it as "moderate physical pressure". About a hundred Palestinians have died in torture sessions. Thousands have resulted psychologically traumatized. This is the real objective. The Public Committee against Torture in Israel published a report in 2014 in which stated that 74% of arrested Palestinian children had suffered violence from the Israeli guards. Many had been put into cages. Some suffered sexual abuse. Because torture and violence are not used to get information. The real goal is the exercise of power: the Palestinians have to learn that there is a master and a slave. And the master is the only one

who can punish the slave. All Palestinians know that. There is not even a family without a martyr or someone in prison.

When we visit some of the ex-prisoners friends, there is always a poster with their name and their image in a visible place of the front of the house. They are the pride of the family, the neighbourhood and the community. Prisoners are the example. The bravest. The most patient.

KILLING BEAUTY (PAGE 104)

I was few days under the bombs. Close to the port and to government buildings that were bombed every night. I saw how, at first, people did not run or speed up during the bombings. Why? Because there is nowhere to run to. There is no shelter in Gaza. I heard that some families would sleep together in the same room in order to die together if fatality fell on them. At Shifa's hospital I saw fathers carrying their destroyed children. I saw beautiful little girls sleeping with shrapnel on their heads. And I saw young people without legs, unconscious, yet unaware.

In 2014, the Israel war machinery bombed by air, land and sea, for fifty days, two hundred schools, seventy nurseries and four universities. Seven UNRWA (the UN branch for Palestine refugees) school-shelters suffered attacks that injured and killed hundreds of civilians. More than five hundred children were killed. It is estimated that three thousand have been mutilated or disabled. What might have the gunner been thinking when he threw a projectile to the four children playing football on Gaza City beach? Why did he decided to modify the angle to fire a second projectile that killed them all? According to several reports from international and human rights organizations, civilian deaths accounted for 75% of the total. Seven mosques were reduced to rubble. Two hundred more suffered severe damage. For many Palestinians, these are holy places; places for peace, prayer and shelter for the spirit. Al-Omari Mosque, in Jabalia, was one of the destroyed. It was built 1365 years ago. The very old tombs of the church were also damaged. The animals of the zoo were killed again.

The last image I have is the car trip along the central Saladin Road, among craters, demolished buildings and pillars of fire. I passed through all the Strip, from the city of Gaza, in the north, to the Rafah crossing, in the south. Through the window I saw how the farmers kept transporting vegetables on their slow carts, how the sellers waited for their clients sitting at the door of the shops and how the cleaners swept the streets and picked up the rubbish. The war had started but people refused to stop living. Maybe this is beauty.

KILLING THE TRUTH (PAGE 106)

When the war started I was at Alaa's office. Alaa is a documentary film maker and friend. I was using his laptop to edit the photos I had taken with Manu's camera. Through the window, I saw how the first bombs fell, rising clouds of black smoke. I took photos of them. It was the last day I used the motorbike. In that same studio I held the videocamera that accompanied its operator, Khaled Hamad, until his death. The first victim of the press, however, was Hamid Shihab, a driver for a television unit who was hit by a missile at the entrance of one of the press buildings. The same building where Mussa'ab and Isabel were working restlessly. A Palestinian and an Aragonese who are working their fingers to the bone to tell what is happening in Gaza.

In fifty days, Israel killed seventeen press workers. According to a report by the Gaza Center for Media Freedom, twelve media offices and eleven journalist houses were bombed. The Israeli army spokeswoman wrote on a letter to the New York Times that the victims were "terrorists with cameras and notebooks" and, as such, legitimate objectives. I imagine they thought the same the dawn of 31 of May 2010 when they assaulted the Mavi Marmara in international waters. The Israeli soldiers killed Cevdet Kiliçlar when he was holding his camera. They shot him between the eyes, literally, from a few meters away. In Istanbul, his daughter told us that her father was teaching her how to be a journalist.

SAILS AND WINDS (PAGE 122)

Thousands of years ago, Homer wrote Ulysses' Odyssey. An epic poem that takes us, sailing, around the Mediterranean. To go back home, to Penelope and Telemachus. To find Ithaca.

Between 1492 and 1502, the Spanish Catholic Monarchs decreed the conversion or expulsion of Muslims and Iberian Jews. A century later, the deportation of those who had resisted was ordered. In 1609, the ports of Vinaròs, Moncofa, València, Dénia and Alacant witnessed how thousands of desperate families set sail. To get to Tunisia, Algeria and Turkey. Muslims and Jews, Moorish and Sephardic Jews would be embraced in Islamic lands.

In 1939, thousands of Spanish republican refugees pile into the port of Alacant following the offensive of fascist troops. The captain of the British ship Stanbrook took pity on them and, slipping past the blockade, led them to salvation from a certain death. To Algeria, again.

In 1947, thousands of Jewish survivors from the Holocaust sail in the Exodus after the European governments treat them like outcast. From port to port, they finally arrive in Palestine. When they do arrive, however, British troops assault the ship. A pitched battle takes place and three people die.

In 2010 an international flotilla composed of activists from fifty nations meet in Istanbul. They sail towards Gaza to break the blockade with 10,000 tons of aid. Israeli elite troops assault the six ships.

In 2014, Gaza's Ark is built. A ship that aims to break the siege from the inside, taking Palestinian products to the exterior world. A guided missile hits it one of the first days of the war. It burns to ashes.

As always, new ships and new odysseys will continue sailing from the Mediterranean ports.

ONE WHO SAVES ONE LIFE SAVES THE ENTIRE WORLD (PAGE 132)

It is written on Jewish and Muslims sacred texts. On the Torah and on the Quran. One who kills an innocent life should be considered as though he had killed the whole humanity. And one who saves a life should be considered as though he had saved an entire world.

During the military operation against Gaza in 2014, some surveys were conducted in Israel. Terrifying numbers were given. Between 80 and 90% of the population showed their support to the military operation in Gaza. Despite the numbers, we should ask ourselves: Who is this minority who opposes war? And, what do Jews around the world say? The Zionist State claims to represent them. Is that true?

I met Hedy Epstein in Cairo. She is a venerable old lady. German and Jewish. Her family died in the Holocaust. She remembers seeing through her window the first parade of Nazi troops. The uniforms. The boots. When she visited Israel she saw again the boots and the uniforms and she swore not to be part of that world. Since then, she consumes the time she has got left helping today's persecuted: the Palestinians.

In Stockholm I met Dror Feiler. Of German and Jewish origin, too. His family escaped from Nazism. And he arrived in Palestine. He told me how they hide at home Palestinians escaping from the troops of the new State of Israel. Today he is one of the organizers of the Freedom Flotillas.

I have known Ronnie Kasrils thanks to the media. South African Jew, he joined Nelson Mandela's guerrilla. As leader of the spies of the revolution he confronted the apartheid system. He discovered there that his enemy had a loyal ally: the Mossad and the State of Israel. This is why Desmond Tutu, Mandela and himself have been key figures in the solidarity with Palestine.

Very young, Omer Goldman is the daughter of a former Mossad chief. She has grown up in the heart of the state. When she visited the occupied territories she witnessed everything she had been hidden. Today, she is one of the voices of Shministim, the rebellious students who prefer prison to joining the army.

The decline of the Zionist dream is clearly explained by rabbi Ron Aigen from Montreal: "It used to be that Israel was always the uniting factor in the Jewish world", "But it's become contentious and sadly, I think it is driving people away from the organized Jewish community".

SAINT GEORGE, A PALESTINIAN MARTYR (PAGE 136)

Saint George was the son of a Roman soldier and a Palestinian from Lydda. Following in the footsteps of his father, he joined the army. It was the time of Christian rebellion against the Empire. George was ordered to persecute the rebels. And he refused to. Secretly, he was also part of the insurgent who denied the divine character of emperors and the Roman State. This is the reason why he was sentenced to death and executed.

When Christian crusaders arrived in Palestine in 1098, they were surprised about the fact that Muslims from Lydda had maintained the cult to Saint George, who they called Al-Khadr. At that time, both Christians and Muslims honored him. When they were back from the crusades, the myth of Saint George arrived in Europe and his veneration rapidly expanded to Naples, Aragon, Catalonia, Alcoi or Paiporta. It has also become the patron saint of England, Portugal, Greece, Rusia and Ethiopia, among others.

In 1948, Lydda had 20,000 inhabitants. Approximately 18,500 were Muslim and 1,500, Christians. That year, the Zionist armed bands received an order from Yitzhak Rabin: "The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled". Four hundred people were killed. Many women were raped. The population was deported and scattered. 1,800 trucks were needed to transport what they plundered from the Palestinian properties. Israeli historian Benny Morris has documented it. And David Ben Gurion, the founder of the State, confirmed it on his War Diary.

In Spring 2014, I found the icon of Saint George, the Palestinian martyr, in Gaza's Orthodox church. Its combat is still alive.

GAZA AND GOLIATH (PAGE 140)

Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions tell the story of the warrior Goliath and David, the shepherd. The Philistine and Israelite armies meet in the Elah Valley. David's brothers are part of the Jewish army. He spends his days taking care of the sheep and feeding them. Goliath, as the champion of the soldiers, challenges the enemies to fight against him in order to end the battle without a bloodbath. Everyone is afraid of him. But David offers to fight. King Saul says to him: "Goliath has been a warrior all his life and you are just a young man". David replies: "I have taken care of my father's flock. When a lion or a bear attacked, I killed them and I rescued the sheep". Saul accepts and provides him with his sword and his armour. But David refuses them. They are too big and heavy. He takes five stones from the river and keeps them in his bag. With the sling on hand he approaches the giant. Goliath is outraged by the insult of being challenged by a kid. "Come here and I will give your flesh to the wild animals and birds", he says. When the soldier slowly approaches David with his weapons, David fits a stone in his sling and, out of a single hit, he knocks down the powerful Goliath.

In 2014, one of the most powerful armies of the world attacks one of the poorest and more isolated places of the world. Satellites, drones, fighter-bombers, helicopters, missiles, destroyer ships, submarines, artillery, armored vehicles and tanks with the latest technology are relentlessly thrown against the small Gaza Strip. Dozens of thousands of elite soldiers surround the territory along all the border. In the underground tunnels, hundreds of members of the resistance, armed with rocket launchers and rifles organize the defense. They have grown up using the sling. And they are not afraid of death.

THE WOUNDED PHOENIX (PAGE 154)

The city of Gaza is one of the oldest in the world. It dates back to, at least, four thousand years. Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines, Israelites, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians, Byzantines, Arabs, Muslims, Crusaders, Ottomans, Britons and Israelis have lived there. It has been conquered and liberated infinite times. It has been destroyed and rebuilt so many times that they cannot be counted. Maybe this is why the Phoenix is its symbol. Ovid, the Roman poet, explains that when this mythological bird arrives to the end of its extremely long vital cycle, it builds its nest with cinnamon sticks. The bird itself ignites it so as bird and nest burn

until becoming ashes. The new Phoenix will be born from these ashes. Primitive Christians see this myth of Greek and Egyptian origin as a symbol of renovation and rebirth. The Arabs call it Al-Anqa.

The Palestinian Gaza has been injured many times. Maybe this is why its inhabitants have developed what psychologists call resilience. That is, the ability to face adversities and to survive the trauma. And the most important of all: the miracle of becoming stronger and positively transformed by suffering. How to avoid hate, vengeance and despair in front of so much horror? Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychologist who survived Auschwitz, discovered at the concentration camps that only those who were able to make sense of the hardships could accept it and learn from it. Husam El-Nounou, from the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, explained to me, in his office in front of the sea, that Palestinian society has two basic pillars for resilience. The first is the traditional family and community structure. The extended family and the neighbourhood create a network of solidarity in which no one, little or older, is ever alone. The second pillar is the fact that they still have a system of traditional beliefs and values that give life a meaning and prepare them to what might happen. In good moments, shukr, gratitude, is shown. While facing difficulties, sabr, patience and perseverance, apply.

ADAM AND EVE (PAGE 160)

We have been explained, in our tradition, that the origin of humanity comes from a couple: Adam and Eve. And that they lived in paradise, in peace and in balance. One day, the evil forces tempted them with the arrogance of disobeying God. They ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and they learnt that Good and Evil could exist and that each element of Creation could be seen as part of the Unity or as separated elements. Then they were ashamed and frightened for the first time. Attaining freedom to do good and evil they opened the doors to the Fall. This was the Original Sin. God punished them. Them and their offspring, who suffered with blood and sweat. In the Islamic tradition, there is a nuance in this story. God explains on the Quran that Adam did not betray him, but that he forgot their pact. God also says that Adam, aware of his mistake, rectified to be guided again. This is why Adam is the first prophet. God did not condemn Adam, Eve and humanity to suffering despite their weaknesses, but he proclaimed them caliphs of Creation. That is, responsible for keeping the natural Order in the world. This is how the path was set; not towards a cold and inhuman sanctity, but back towards the origin: to the state of Fitra or primordial nature. Good, then, is going back to humbleness and balance and to protect beauty; Evil is arrogance, to hide beauty and to generate chaos. Good is the return to Unity; Evil, going towards Separation. Catalan architect and mystic, Gaudí understood it and expressed it in a very simple way when he said that “the book than one should always keep open is the book of nature”.

An April morning I saw a young couple with their little daughter at Khouzaa fields. They were reaping the wheat together, with their grandparents, brothers and sisters. Knelt and bare hands they were working with their sickles. Over their heads, war planes roared. Some hundred meters from there, hidden behind a hill, snipers were pointing at them. The family smiled and you could feel peace, joy and strength just by watching them. What was the secret in their hearts that is unknown to us?

MORALS AND LIGHTS (PAGE 168)

In Venezuela I read that Simon Bolívar, leader of the Latin American independence, declared that “an ignorant nation is a blind instrument of its own destruction”. And he added that education alone did not suffice; “morals and lights” were needed.

The Arab world, and Palestine, are maybe in the worst moment in their history. Fragmented, colonized, impoverished, corrupted and manipulated. They are prisoners of all kind of dictatorships, satrapies and false prophets. But among all that darkness, there is a light that humbly shines. So much that too often we cannot see it. And we are not shown it. What very few know is that the Palestinian society has managed to be one of the most cultured and educated

of the Arab world. Despite decades of war and occupation. According to World Bank data, literacy among young Palestinians reaches 98%. Most of these youth declare that education is their priority. On top of this, in Palestine, there are ten universities. These numbers, typical of a developed country, are really impressive taking into account the huge difficulties that teachers and students face. Locked up, blockaded, occupied and under the bombs.

But the lights of knowledge are nothing without the morals. And it is here where Palestine shines stronger in a world dominated by obscurity. Because the education of mind, and of reason, is essential for the human being. But it is the education of heart, faith and morals, what gives it a meaning and a direction.

THE GIRLS OF THE AL-ANDALUS (PAGE 182)

A regular day, Valeria, the Venezuelan, and I go to Al-Andalus supermarket to buy some food for the activists and the journalists that are staying in our apartment. Zaater, oil, dates, olives, yogurts, fruit, vegetables, eggs, biscuits, etc. And a lot, a lot of coffee. We call a cab, because we are just two and we are carrying about twenty bags. When the car arrives, we struggle to carry the bags. Along the street, a group of ten or twelve-year-old girls in school uniforms and carrying schoolbags. Without even saying hello, they take our bags and carry them to the car. And without saying goodbye, they continue their way home, where lunch is waiting for them.

Already at home, I think that my children have to be like them.

Sails and winds shall fulfill my desires, following dubious paths upon the sea. North-West and West winds arming against them; South-East, East winds must now be helping them, with their friends, North-Eastern and Southerly winds, humbly praying the Northerly wind to be partial to them in its blowing so that all five fulfill my return.

AUSIÀS MARCH (PAGE 14)



Slow vessels get lost in seas of uncertain dangers.

SALVADOR ESPRIU (PAGE 20)



I will always come back
to our beach.
The waves don't allow me,
my mother,
to get too far away.

MARIA DEL MAR BONET (PAGE 22)



In the creation of the heavens and the earth are
signs for those of understanding.

QURAN. 3:190 (PAGE 28)



The hour of sunlight in prison, a cloud reflecting
a swarm of creatures, the peoples' applause
for those who face death
with a smile.
And tyrant's fear
of songs.
We have on this earth
what makes life worth living.

MAHMUD DARWISH (PAGE 40)



Fire on the hands today
that high clouds presage
a rainy Autumn
and living feels strange
in the middle of this false
tranquillity.
Life burns subjected
to a wheel that spins.
The axe pinned in
knife that deepens
the wound. The blood
emerges hot.
The movement of its flowing
a pendulum that always returns
to the same place of origin.
This is how we walk along
the vivid unconscious sphere
(and years feel
light). All this death,
not mine, lies heavy upon me.

MONTSERRAT ABELLÓ (PAGE 46)



I never carried a rifle
on my shoulder.
Or pulled a trigger.
All I have
is a flute's melody
a brush to paint my dreams,
a bottle of ink.
All I have
is unshakeable faith
and infinite love
for my people in pain.

TAWFIQ ZAYYAD (PAGE 48)



Father, Lord of heaven and earth.
I praise you because you have hidden
these things
from the wise and learned, and revealed
them to the ordinary people.

Gospel according to **MATTHEW** (PAGE 96)



I'm with those of broken hearts.

*God to Muhammad. Hadith Qudsi.
Related by* **AL-GAZHALI** (PAGE 58)



Oh the first years' home! How far we are!
Oh land that I now remember soaked in
red tears!
Does being the homeland of an infant
forces to love it forever?
She is the homeland I love, before which
I am humble.
I never abandoned her, I never
abandoned her,
I was forced to leave.

AL-RUSSAFI (PAGE 62)



And I asked you, impatient.
Tell me, when will we go to Jerusalem?
Tell me, when will we?
When the wires will break and the line
will be naturally green.
We will go then.
When the hafif will be continuous, from
Gaza to Hebron.
We will go then.
When my name is not written on red ink
anymore. We will go then.
Then, we will never go?
If you keep thinking that way...
No, we will never go.

ISABEL PÉREZ (PAGE 120)

[*Hafif*: sound produced by the air when
blowing amongst the ear of wheat at
the field.]



Patience is about waiting, not passively,
but working persistently, even if the
solution is not in the near future. Wating
for things to happen without doing
everything within reach "is nonsense",
as Saint Teresa says.

ANTONI GAUDÍ (PAGE 146)



The source of all man's misery is not death,
but the fear of death.

EPICETETUS (PAGE 80)



Sowing death you provide higher life.
Here we are with bare hands.
Death forbids everything to you,
each death provides me with new
sibblings

MAX AUB (PAGE 102)



You might be killed or you might be
laughed at, you might be betrayed;
these are just banalities.
What counts is the awareness
of being nothing unless being people.
And you, gravely, have chosen.
After your strict silence,
you walk decidedly.
Because what counts is the example
and you have to be exemplary in all,
exemplary in every moment,
and forget about yourself,
and be each of your people
and make yours their sorrow,
and make yours their fury,
and then you will entirely be,
to the eyes of God and to the eyes of
men,
and you will be people forever.

VICENT ANDRÉS ESTELLÉS (PAGE 138)



I would have liked to tell you
the story of a nightingale that died.
I would have liked to tell you
the story...
Had they not slit my lips.

SAMIH AL-QASIM (PAGE 118)



Old
land
of oil lamps
and sorrow.
Land
of death without eyes
and arrows.

FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA (PAGE 134)



The living want to die in their country
no open doors
no open seas
no open hands
full of heart.
Each day faith over fear.
Each day a mirror of fire.
A great miracle here
the living are dying and the dying living
a festival of lights
a strip a land a blaze
the sea a mirror of fire
a casting of lead upon children.
Their heads roll
off their shoulders into streets.

SUHEIR HAMMAD (PAGE 114)



That's me knocking your door.
Every door, every door.
But you cannot see me.
A dead child cannot be seen.
I became a handful of ashes
that the wind dispersed.

NAZIM HIKMET (PAGE 146)



Beauty is the splendor of Truth.

PLATO (PAGE 150)



THE POEMS

I have inherited my grandparents' hope
and my parents' patience.
And from all of them, the words
I am using now
to talk to you.

MIQUEL MARTÍ I POL (PAGE 170)



A sea of sadness rages inside us!
Our desperate hearts burn with eternal
flames!

IBN AMIRA (PAGE 174)



The old will die and the young will forget.

DAVID BEN GURION (PAGE 176)



Your image in my eyes
and in my mouth your name.
You live in my heart.
But where are you hiding?

IBN ARABI (PAGE 194)

On regained health.
On vanished danger.
On hope without memories.
I write your name.
And by the power of a word.
I start my life again
I was only born born to meet you.
To say your name.
Freedom

PAUL ELUARD (PAGE 142)



Patiently, then, persevere.

QURAN. 40:55 (PAGE 152)



Beyond the waves of a sea that makes us
neighbours
we sing you the future, your name
courage,
your name Palestine.
From your brown skin fields your trees
are pulled up
as if by doing so your tomorrow was
uprooted.
Your children are buried when they are
still smiling
hoping your womb to become a barren.
Olive trees with a millenary destiny will
be born
so as birds sing your name which is
courage
your name Palestine.

LLUÍS LLACH (PAGE 124)



I won't come to you.
But you, return to us!
Come back, my friend!
We are all waiting for you.

GHASSAN KANAFANI (PAGE 198)



And if you find it poor, it is not that Ithaca
has fooled you.
Wise, as you are now,
you will understand what Ithacas mean.

KAVAFIS (PAGE 200)



Only the sea remains.
One defiant wave at a time.

SAMAH SABAWI (PAGE 204)



GAZA IS NOT THE MOST
BEAUTIFUL CITY (PAGE 213)

It is not the most elegant or the biggest but it equals the history of an entire homeland, because it is more ugly, impoverished, miserable and vicious in the eyes of enemies. Because it is the most capable among us, of disturbing the enemy's mood and his comfort. Because it is his nightmare. Because it is mined oranges, children without a childhood, old men without old age and women without desires. Because of all this it is the most beautiful, the purest and richest among us and the one most worthy of love.

We do injustice to Gaza when we look for its poems, so let us not disfigure Gaza's beauty. What is most beautiful in it is that it is devoid of poetry at a time when we tried to triumph over the enemy with poems, so we believed ourselves and were overjoyed to see the enemy letting us sing. We let him triumph, then when we dried our lips of poems we saw that the enemy had finished building cities, forts and streets. We do injustice to Gaza when we turn it into a myth, because we will hate it when we discover that it is no more than a small poor city that resists.

MAHMUD DARWISH



(PAGE 214)

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