

## April 9th: Iraq, Fifth Anniversary of “Liberation”

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“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?” Mohandas K. Gandhi, ‘Non-Violence and Peace and War’, 1948.

Iraqis have had yet another western insult imposed upon them: the fifth anniversary of “liberation” and the shameful, staged toppling of the statue of President Saddam Hussein, the face covered by an American flag, by a US marine. A flag, the world was told, which had been rescued from the Twin Towers. Like the alleged hijacker’s passport ( the latter presumably chucked from the ‘plane before impact) the flag too, survived an inferno that melted steel. The Pentagon PR machine must have burned a lot of midnight oil dreaming up that rubbish. The statue’s fall began the systematic destruction and erasure of the history of Mesopotamia and our humanity, ancient and modern.

Whilst government and media, predominantly American and British, feel the need to mark this sixty month holocaust, every day is an April 9th for Iraqis.

Lives, homes, families smashed, fallen, fragmented, ruined. Overnight, Iraqis became the new Palestinians, the world’s new diaspora, fleeing internally and externally, with just what they could carry or load into a vehicle and for many, their travel documents worthless – and if not worthless, unwelcomed by most countries. Just Syria and Jordan took in their neighbours, as those who had burned their house down both refused to reimburse either them, or the good Samaritans who had helped them. For Palestinians who had lived in Iraq, some since Israel’s foundation and their flight under near-identical circumstances sixty years ago, the terror returned and they again became stateless, many trapped in no man’s lands on the Syrian and Jordanian borders, or slaughtered in their homes or the makeshift camps to which they had fled.

Ironically, April 9th is also the sixtieth anniversary of the Israeli’s slaughter of the villagers of Deir Yassin in Palestine, which was: “Bit by bit, submerged in to a hell of screams, exploding grenades, the stench of blood, gunpowder and smoke. The assailants killed, looted and finally, they raped.”(1) The bloody carnage rained on the families of Deir Yassin was code named “Operation Unity”; that rained on Iraq’s entirety, in a mirror image, was “Operation Iraqi Freedom”.

As Israel embarks on its sixtieth birthday celebrations, an Iraqi friend, a globally acknowledged oil expert, sought by companies and governments, worldwide, telephoned. “You must stop saying that the Iraq invasion was primarily driven by its oil”, he said. “There were three paramount reasons for the invasion: ‘Israel, Israel and Israel’ .”

That Iraq had oil and water in abundance, was a vital, but secondary bonus, in his opinion. Saddam Hussein's unwavering support for Palestine was the paramount driving force, he believed. Support by the Iraqis for Palestine, goes back to Israel's inception, where they fought with the Palestinians. As the current intifada raged, prior to the invasion, it was said every house in Baghdad had at least one son who planned to fight the Israelis in Palestine. Saddam Hussein gave money in the support of families who had lost a bread winner, become a suicide bomber. Shocking to most western heads, but who was it who queried the difference "between a Stealth bomber and a suicide bomber"?

Israel, it is well recorded, trained American troops ahead of the Iraq invasion and Israeli tactics became near instantly recognisable: social divisions, house demolitions, trashings, thefts, destruction of municipal and governmental offices and finally, whole communities divided by walls, walled in where all had co-existed for generations. It is now equally well recorded how many Israelis in Iraq are wearing American army uniforms.

Like Palestine, families are scattered to the global winds. Random calls to Iraqi friends and acquaintances were eye watering. Their family homes lie empty, destroyed or taken over – generations of love lavished on them in ruins, precious inherited items lost forever. Families who refused to leave in the 1991 onslaught, the subsequent thirteen year bombings, the embargo. "One brother and his family is in Argentina, another in Libya, another in Germany and another was liberated from his life", said a friend. Another: "H is in Syria, just surviving, G is in Sweden ..."

N, who lost her mother and husband, her dearest, most beloved friend to the embargo's deprivations, has had to take her children to Jordan, leaving behind the house where her lost husband still "lived", their comfort in his imaginative, loving improvements, repairs, additions, through which he still "spoke" to them. They are now adrift in the home of a stranger, hoping their permits to stay will not be revoked, to send them back to the Iraq they love, but to near certain death.

R and her family are in the Emirates, having also been forced out of a home which is a story in itself.

These are some of the lucky ones, not in tents, not cowering in burned out buildings, not waiting for the bullet in the envelope, telling them to go – anywhere – now or the next will be in their heads. As Palestine, every Iraqi refugee seemingly has a story worthy of a book.

Zaid (not his real name) is one of Iraq's four million now displaced. He is a Shia, from southern Iraq, one of those the US and UK assured us, must be liberated from the terrors of Saddam Hussein. As the invading Americans and British swept through his town, American helicopter gunships strafed – from on high – neighbours homes with family friends in them were turned to rubble. The teenager, paralyzed with fear, watched from a window of his then, still standing, home. He saw his friend running down the road – with no head. His neurological system, still, somehow, functioning, in his dying thralls.

When Ziad's home was damaged, the family sought shelter where they could and in the pain and chaos he decided to go to Baghdad, to try to earn something and help to support them all. Eighteen months later, Baghdad became impossible and with (US appointed) Ministries in the hands of militias who were kidnapping at best and murdering at worst, he bought forged travel documents and managed to find refuge in Syria.

In the chaos, he lost touch with his family and unable to find or contact them, had to fend for himself. In Syria, he ended up spending days in jail, due to problems with his papers – terrified and wondering if he would ever be released. A western friend pulled every favour and string available and finally gained his release.

Through a complex, circuitous route, at invitation of friends who would help him, he reached Britain and requested asylum. In his teens, in a strange country, he still did not know if his family were dead or alive. It took him two years to trace them to a refugee camp in a no man's land, neither in Iraq or a neighbouring country. He was a non-person in Britain, they were non-people anywhere.

Feeling that if he had official status in the UK, he could both help them by working and return at least to the Middle East where his heart lay, he applied for British citizenship. Needing documentation from the Iraqi Embassy in London, he travelled there from where he had found friends and a roof, several hours away – an expensive undertaking in the circumstances. The Iraqi Embassy staff mostly spoke Kurdish and not Arabic, inexplicable, but he finally ascertained that he needed to have birth certificate, education documents and proof of Iraq residence, from Iraq. Ministries had been destroyed and his parents, in tents, were uncontactable. The British Home Office requested the same impossible verifications.

Somehow, over months and with the help of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, whom he cannot praise highly enough, he managed to confirm that his parents had the documents that would suffice to start the process of British naturalisation. The Iraqi Embassy and British officials, he says, said that in the circumstances, photocopies would suffice. Clearly, should the originals go missing in transit, no others would exist.

When they finally arrived, he took them to London for validation at the Embassy, in order to present them to the Home Office (another expensive journey on means slender to nil) to be told that only the originals would do. A feat between faith, miracle and UNHCR, eventually had them arrive in the UK.

Months later, Ziad has his citizenship, can work and will soon have his passport. He plans to travel as soon as possible. Where will he go? More than anything, he wants to return to Iraq, but as for all the new diaspora, it is an impossible dream. "So I will go back to Syria, or to Jordan or Turkey, somewhere very near the border, so I can look at, see Iraq again."

His regained "freedom" has come at an ironic cost. He is living in the country whose government has destroyed his beloved land and family. Britain now requires those to whom it grants permanent residency to swear, in a public ceremony, allegiance to the State. He remembered his home town, his headless friend and said he could not do it, the price was not worth it. His friends finally persuaded him that if that was what it took, just to look at Iraq from afar again, he must do it.

The rest of his family have just left their tents and been granted asylum in America. All any of them want is to return to the land from which they have, so literally, been liberated. Ziad, who has endured so much and travelled a path of such courage, length and pain, is barely in his twenties.

April 9th has brought another milestone of ignominy. The mothers of two British soldiers, Fusilier Gordon Gentle Trooper David Clarke, also teenagers, both nineteen, when they were killed in Iraq for lies in high places, were denied a public enquiry into the legality of the

invasion by the highest court in the land, the Law Lords, today.

Rose Gentle and Beverley Clarke, had brought the action under the directives of the European Human Rights Laws. The Law Lords rejected their plea.

Speaking in Westminster Cathedral on April 3rd., Tony Blair, under whose Premiership the falsehoods which have led to the seemingly never-ending tears, horrors and heartbreaks, stemming from the rape of Mesopotamia, said: "I want to awaken the world's conscience". He should start with his own and by addressing the plight of all the victims of his vicious, vain, illegal, immoral actions.

April 9th marks another legacy. It is the belief of fundamentalists in some in the "Judeo-Christian" tradition, that the date of Christ's resurrection was 9th April 30 A.D. Iraq, where the three Abrahamic faiths had their genesis at Ur is the embodiment of resurrection, having done so after numerous invasions of humanity defying ferocity. As Paul William Roberts writes: "This region ..... is just as glorious in its ruin as it was in its glory, for something noble crawls from the rubble to spread golden wings in the light of dawn. The Gate of God opens wider." Or as Iraqis say: "The Lion of Babylon will rise again."

## Notes

(1) "O Jerusalem", by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre  
<http://www.simonsays.com/content/book.cfm?tab=1&pid=585310&er=9781416556275>

The complete site of Mahatama Gandhi <http://www.mkgandhi.org>

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