

Birds No Longer Grace Gaza's Sky

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I adore the blue sky and white clouds over Gaza.

Gaza! City of beauty, creativity, dignity, rebellion, strength, determination, steadfastness, ambition and triumph.

Gaza! City of agony, bitterness, humiliation, waste, displacement, and both physical and psychological disrepair.

In Gaza, the sky's color triggers memories.

Israel's genocidal violence in Gaza started on 7 October. Until today, we have experienced every form of torment.

Even the sky has been changed, its color speaks of pain. It is never pure any more, only adorned with rockets, missiles and artillery shelling.

Birds still fly across the sky, but those that have not been killed, fly free of Gaza due to the merciless Israeli occupation.

Missiles are thrown everywhere without discrimination. Babies are murdered, men wounded, and women carry their constant sorrow in their eyes.

Even the cats seek refuge under our clothes or behind our houses.

Instead of bird chatter, we hear laments.

"Uncle, I waited for my sister to bring a sip of water for three days, but now she lies under the rubble. She only tasted a cup of grief," a little girl says.

A woman mourns her martyred son.

"I named him Ayoub to supply me with tolerance. God, grant me patience."

A tired man invokes God's generosity as the rain comes down.

"My children have not had water since last night. Today, they quench their thirst with the winter rain."

The Laments of Gaza

Here, a mother shares her sorrow.

"I endured 350 injections to give birth after 12 years of waiting. Israel has deprived me of my long-awaited child."

There, a mother shares her joy. "Sister! Kamal! He is alive!"

A man stands in the rubble of his house. "I lost my home. I lost all the memories there."

A young girl is defiant. "World! I am proud that my family has been martyred."

A 13-year-old confesses to being numb. "I lost my feelings."

A father tells his daughter he searched for four days to find her some bread. A mother pines for death to join her children. A child cries for water. A tired doctor barks orders.

A young woman Khuloud says, "The night was horrible. We could not call our father and seek his advice on where to go. The bombing was everywhere. We are scared."

"We escaped to the end of Gaza, but there is no safe place here," a woman says in anger.

A child says, "We have aged beyond our years."

"Are we not human?" This woman has lost her children. "We are created from flesh, blood, heart and mind. We experience happiness and sadness. We love our life. We want to live."

A mourning father does not want to be known as a hero. "We are strong people. We have become exhausted and we want peace."

Solace in Prayer

The sky is somber, the air rings with lament.

I hate the night. I hate it!

On 11 December my husband and I were suddenly jolted awake to the dreadful sound of artillery shelling. Windows shattered.

The sky was painted in a bleak red hue from the fires and explosions.

We rushed out of our room and joined a family huddled in a small space just big enough to hold us all.

A mother with a month-old baby prayed out loud, "God, if we die, please let me die with my

baby. I cannot bear the thought of leaving him alone in this world.”

Her tears affected me deeply.

Amid the chaos, my family reassured one another and I found solace in prayer.

Israel has no right to take innocent lives. It has no justification. We are living with dead souls and dead bodies. How dare they?

At night, our area was bombed again, leaving us without internet connection or electricity. They targeted ambulances and journalists.

We tried to return to sleep but I found it impossible. When the sun rose, I wished for just half an hour of rest.

On 15 December at 7 pm, the sky lit up with ominous light, foreshadowing another night of fear.

Mentally exhausted, I avoid sleep to prevent waking in panic.

The night is like a grave. We are never certain if it will open or close its door on our souls and bodies.

I have no wish to pass away without first seeing my mother, father and siblings.

We thought we would be safe in Khan Younis. We thought wrong. Israel commits massacres against civilians even in the south.

No birds grace the sky. There is no pure color to it any more. A veil of smoke hangs heavy and gray, broken only by the red hue from Israel’s attacks.

The sky reflects our bloodshed and our desperation.

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Batoul Mohamed Abou Ali graduated recently from the Islamic University of Gaza.

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