

Crippled

By Riyam Kafri AbuLaban

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9:00 a.m.

I have been awake for over two hours. I have been stuck on my bed for two hours. This is the case these days. Inability to get out of bed is simply the norm. Ahmed has gone to work, the children are sleeping soundlessly – what you get when they finally doze off at 1 a.m. – this used to be my favourite time of the day, when the children are sleeping and there is absolute quiet. My brain steadily quiets down, my breathing becomes rhythmically audible, and there it is, my centre waiting to swallow me into its warmth and silence. But not these days. These days silence only means the relentless jumping from one news website to the other, the fanatical scrolling down my Facebook newsfeed and my Twitter home page. Silence is



female-Mayar Nayef Alyazji, 2, female-Wajdi Mahmoud Ali Alyazji, 54, male-Nabia Eissa Sefinaz Alyazji, 51, female-Anas Alyazji, 5, male-Karam Ibrahim Atia Barham, 25, male-Nithal Ali Mohamed Abudeqqa, 26, male-Nithal Jumaa Mohamed Abuatia, 42, male-Mohamed Abdelkarim Atia Almasri, 30, male-Mohamed Ibrahim Saleem Abuhadaf, 23, male-Mohamed Khamis Matar Alghalban, 25, male-Aya Yasser Alqasas, female-Aisha Yasser Alqasas, female-Nesma Iyad Saad Alqasas, 11, female-Lamia Iyad Saad Alqasas, 12, female-Yasmeen Alqasas, female-Israa Yasser Khadar Alqasas, 11, female-Samia Mohamed Nasser Alqasas, 33, female-Arwa Alqasas, female-Iyad Mohamed Sulaiman Sabah, 18, male-Aarfa Sultan Maarouf, 70, male-Nayef Abuadwan, male-Thaker Ayman Siyam, male-Mohamed Mahmoud Abdelhameed Almaghreby, 23, male-Ibrahim Asaad Abdelkader Alqarra, 34, male-Fadi Aazmi Bareem, male-Osman Salem Bareem, male-Salem Abdelmajeed Bareem, male-Ibrahim Deeb Ahmed Alkilani, 53, male-Mahmoud Shaaban Mohamed Derbas, 37, male-Yasser Ibrahim Deeb Alkilani, 8, male-Elyas Ibrahim Deeb Alkilani, 4, male-Taghreed Shaaban Mohamed Alkilani, 45, female-Susan Ibrahim Deeb Alkilani, 11, female-Reem Ibrahim Deeb Alkilani, 12, female-Aida Shaaban Mohamed Derbas, 47, female-Yaseen Ibrahim Deeb Alkilani, 9, male-Einas Shaaban Mohamed Derbas, 30, female-Sawra Shaaban Mohamed Derbas, 41, female-Fadi Bashir Alebadlah, male-Jihad Mahmoud Abdelhamid Almaghreby, 22, male-Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Abdelghafour, 22, male-Abdelkader Khalid Yousef Alharazeen, 24, male-Mohamed Ahmed Abdelrahman Ammar, 41, male-Saheel Fareed Shahda Jelou, 48, male-Mohamed Abdelaziz Aouda Ashtiyw, 27, male-Abdelrahman Mohamed Abdelfatah Alaal, 23, male-Mariam Hassan Awad Ezam, 50, female-Fatima Hassan Awad Ezam, 72, female-Moueen Mohamed Mahrous Siyam, 5, male-Rezq Nayef Aatyawy Edwan, 35, male-Wael Jamal Harb, 32, male-Hassan Khadar Hassan Beker, 56, male-Mahmoud Sulaiman Mahmoud Abusubha, 19, male-Abdallah Ismaeel Omar Albaheysi, 27, male-Museib Saleh Aouda Salamah, 19, male-Mohamed Naser Khalid Haroon, 28, male-Naji Jamal Mohamed Alfajem, 25, male-Ibtihal Ibrahim Aayesh Alremahi, female-Eman Ibrahim Aayesh Alremahi, female-Yousef Ibrahim Aayesh Alremahi, male-Salwa Abdelaziz Ahmed Almenify, 50, female-Samira Send Mohamed Menify, 19, female-Ahmed Abuhaseera, male-Layla Abbas Ismaeel Alwaheedy, 60, female-Atia Nasser Dardouna, 26, male-Haitham Samir Khalil Alagha, 25, male-Waleed Sulaiman Abudahir, 21, male-Khadra Awad Abutaylakh, 50, female-Mohamed Abdrabah Ali Alqarra, 22, male-Zakariya Sulaiman Shahada Abudeqqa, male-Mohamed Faris Mohamed Alhemadiya, 17, male-Mohamed Atia Mohamed Alhemadiya, 24, male-Mohamed Mohamed Abdelsalam Albakri, 22, male-Fatima Ahmed Abdelkader Aaljarra, 14, female-Yasmeen Ahmed Aouda Abumur, 28, female-Sameh Zahri

GAZA
Lest We
Forget

nothing but a symptom of the unequivocal feeling of helplessness. I am crippled. Gaza has left me crippled with...anger? Hate? Shame?

I am ashamed of humanity and its inability to wake up in the face of inhumane, indiscriminate shelling and bombing of civilians in what is perpetually the largest open-air prison. Gaza is approximately 45 km in length and 15 km in width – 15 km in width. That is not even a half-marathon in length!

I sit in silence in front of my computer screen starting one paragraph after another, deleting one paragraph after another. Nothing I write can come close to describing the images and sound bites coming out of Gaza. Nothing I can put into words will do Gaza justice. To date 23 families have been completely wiped out and the death toll seems to be racing towards 2,000 at the speed of light. Images of children cut in half, legs severed from their bodies, and brains pouring out of cracked-open skulls are now a constant. They form an arabesque background to our everyday life. Life these days seems mundane and unimportant, our daily worries and details seem to cower in shame in front of the ferocious atrocities that are taking place in Gaza. The silence I used to love so much while the children slept, the silence that used to bring me peace of mind is now infiltrated. It is drowned out by status-sharing,



Photo by Shareef Sarhan.



retweeting, photo-posting, and article-sharing on every possible social media outlet. My silence, my inability to write or speak coherently about what is happening to Gaza is another symptom of this new helplessness I have been feeling. I am crippled...with anger? Hate? Shame? Pain?

For the past month I have had a hole in my heart, a blunt pain, as though a ton of metal is sitting on my sternum preventing my ribcage from rising to breathe. The blunt pain is unbearable at night; it turns into burning unfallen tears that refuse to be shed, into urgent prayers that trip on themselves as they pour unconsciously out of my mouth. A blunt pain masterfully diagnosed by psychologists, humanists,

children. I cannot look at them without being whisked through their optical nerves to the image of the orphaned toddler who only stopped crying when doctors sat him beside his mother's dead body. He immediately quieted down waiting for his mom to wake up. My dear child, your wait, I am afraid, is an eternal one.

I cannot bathe my children and dress them without thinking of the endless number of children with no mothers to bathe and dress them ever again. Who will lull them to sleep at night? Who will hold them in her arms and assure them that everything is going to be ok? Who will bake birthday cakes and blow up balloons? Who will buy tiaras and birthday hats? I cannot look my children in the eyes knowing that in this small displaced and disconnected country, just a few hours away from my seemingly normal home, there are children orphaned forever. There are



Photo by Mohamed Zanoon.

and scientists as a broken heart. Have you ever had a broken heart? It feels like an unexploded missile has landed in your chest cavity, cracking the walls and valves of your atria but never completely shattering them into pieces.

I have a hole in my heart the size of Gaza and the depth of its sea. It is a hole so deep you can almost feel the heat of the Earth's core radiating with...anger? Hate? Frustration? Or is it shame? Yes it must be shame. I am ashamed of my own

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“One should feel obliged to think about what it means to look at them [images of great cruelties and crimes], about the capacity to assimilate what they show.” *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag

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children forever maimed. An entire generation physically handicapped and emotionally scarred. What do you suppose they think or feel?

As the profane images of the massacres in Gaza invaded our newsfeeds on social-media networks and television newscasts, many of us sat mesmerised in disbelief. As humans we are lured by the images of calamity. In her essay collection *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that there

is something pornographic about images of calamity. Humans, according to Sontag, are lured by images of disaster and pain, but this time there was nothing lurking. The images blazing live from Shajaeya, Khuza, Khan Younis, Rafah, and the entire Gaza Strip are not images of the other. They are a projection of a parallel universe that very much exists. Gaza is not the other. Gaza is us. This is the reality that Palestinians have not faced in years, the unyielding brutality of Israeli occupation that many of us have so luxuriously been able to ignore since Oslo. The feeling of



helplessness does not stem from fear but from utter shock at relearning what occupation is. The genocidal facts that come out of Gaza tell the true narrative of the Palestinian struggle. We are all targets. We are all prisoners in an open-air prison. We are not in control; we are not free. Regardless of any feelings of pride and high morale, we are ultimately the occupied, the battered, the killed, and the orphaned.

I am not crippled because I am afraid; I am crippled because I, like many others, fell for the hologram of a peaceful life. I let my daily simplistic desires take over. I was busy potty training, feeding, and planning a bright future for my children. But now it is apparent to me, there is no bright future for any child if the status quo continues. There is no peace if we are nothing but moving targets for gun-happy settlers. The bright future I have been romantically dreaming of for Basil and Taima is not possible with 10,000 injured in Gaza over the course of a month. It is not possible with so many children recounting the horror of being stuck underneath the rubble of their own homes. Any bright future should include a just and fair solution for all of us. We cannot continue to live like this.

I am crippled because I am finally waking up, and I am trying to come to terms with the reality all of us have not yet faced. This is exactly how Sleeping Beauty must have felt after waking up – dazed, disoriented, and helpless.

I am crippled now, but soon I will get over it. And so will all of us. And soon helplessness will be replaced with action. You just wait.

Dr. Riyam Kafri AbuLaban is a chemist by training, a writer by passion. She is an assistant professor at Al Quds University, Abu Dis, Palestine, and a mother of two. She is currently working on a food memoir that documents food, motherhood, and Palestine. In her free time she makes homemade ice cream and cupcakes with the help of the tiny little hands of Basil and Taima. At the epicentre of her creativity is her husband and partner Ahmed.

Photo by Eduardo Soteras Jalil.

