

DIARIES



The Gaza genocide

Laila El-Haddad writing from the US, *Live from Palestine*, 2 March 2008

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Palestinian families are forced to flee constant Israeli air strikes just outside the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, 1 March 2008. (Wissam Nassar/[MaanImages](#))

We celebrated Yousuf's fourth birthday today. We ate cake. And we counted the bodies. We sang happy birthday. And my mother sobbed. We watched the fighter jets roar voraciously on our television screen, pounding street after street, then heard a train screech outside, and shuddered. Yousuf tore open his presents, and asked my mother to make a paper *zanana*, a drone, for him with origami; we were torn open from the inside, engulfed by a feeling of impotence and helplessness, fear and anger and grief, despondence and confusion.

"We are dying like chickens" said my husband Yassine last night as we contemplated the media's coverage of the events of the past few days.

Even *The Guardian* (UK), in a newswire-based piece, mentioned the Palestinian dead, including the children, in the *fourth to last* paragraph.

In fact, a study by If Americans Knew found that the Associated Press Newswire (AP) coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict significantly distorts reality, essentially over-reporting the number of Israelis killed in the conflict and underreporting the number of Palestinians killed. The study found that AP reported on Israeli children's deaths more often than the deaths occurred, but failed to cover 85 percent of Palestinian children killed. A few years ago, they found that *The New York Times* was seven times more likely to comment on an Israeli child's death than that of a

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Is it only when Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai used the word *shoah* to describe what will come to Gaza that some media outlets took note. Here was an Israeli government official himself invoking the Holocaust, of his people's most horrific massacre, in reference to the fate of Gaza. But it was not necessarily because Gazans may suffer the same fate that they were perturbed, but rather that this event, this phrase -- genocide or holocaust -- could be used with such seeming levity, that using such a loaded term may somehow lessen the true horror of the original act.

It is as though what has been happening in Gaza -- what continues to happen -- whether by way of the deliberate and sustained siege and blockade, or the mounting civilian death toll, is acceptable, and even encouraged. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has said that genocide "is the only appropriate way to describe what the Israeli army is doing in the Gaza Strip" after much thought and deliberation.

But the real genocide in Gaza cannot or will not be assessed through sheer numbers. It is not a massacre of gas chambers. No.

It is a slow and calculated genocide -- a genocide through more calibrated, long-term means. And if the term is used in any context, it should be this. In many ways, this is a more sinister genocide, because it tends to be overlooked: all is ok in Gaza, the wasteland, the hostile territory that is accustomed to slaughter and survival; Gaza, whose people are somehow less human; we should not take note, need not take note, unless there is a mass killing or starvation.

As though what is happening now was not a slow, purposeful killing, a mass strangulation. But the governments and presidents of the civilized world, even our own "president" (president of what?) are hungry for peace deals and accords, summits and states. So they say, "let them eat cake!" And we do.

Laila El-Haddad is a Palestinian freelance journalist, photographer, and blogger who divides her time between Gaza and the United States. She most recently co-directed the short film Tunnel Trade, which aired on CBC and Al Jazeera International. Her blog, Raising Yousuf, is named after her four-year-old son.

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