**Endurance in Gaza**

Afaf Jabiri

Tuesday, Feb 20, 2024

My generation was surrounded by people with vivid memories of pre-1948 life and the harrowing events of the Nakba from 1947 to 1949. These narratives have become a canvas upon which I try to comprehend the profound impacts of atrocities committed in Gaza against the Palestinians.

Conversations within the camp consistently harkened back to the past, with every aspect of daily life measured against the backdrop of pre-Nakba times. The elderly recounted their losses, their painful journeys of exile, the profound trauma they endured, and the continuing sense of injustice in their hearts.

For us, the younger generation, it was not just about hearing historical events; it was a visceral experience of living alongside those who directly witnessed and endured the atrocities of that tumultuous period. The weight of their memories, losses and continuing struggles shaped our understanding of identity and fuelled the quest for justice.

Certain stories became enduring narratives within the camp, readily retold and passed down through generations, especially those related to resistance. Yet, there were stories that surfaced rarely or were deliberately concealed, particularly from strangers and researchers who intermittently visited the camp seeking to document narratives.

Among the concealed stories were those entailing the agonising experiences of forced starvation, instances of sexual violence perpetrated by the Jewish Haganah militia against both men and women, and the heart-wrenching narratives of mothers who, amid bombardment, left their children behind.

The latter stories, if resumed later by the fortunate reunion of parent and child, were recounted with a certain sense of pride for the strength displayed. For those who never knew the fate of their children and other loved ones, these stories were so painful that they were not spoken of in an attempt to hide the severe sense of loss and guilt.

Yet, it was the narratives of hunger that bore the most profound emotional weight. When recounted, these stories were often punctuated with the poignant expression, “I pray to God that these days are never relived or experienced by anyone, whether a friend or foe”.

Adding to the anguish in these stories was the underlying sense of shame. In a community once skilled in the art of food production, the recollection of starvation represented a dissonance – a stark departure from the strength and resourcefulness that defined their heritage.

The memory of forced starvation reflected not only physical deprivation but a profound departure from the self-sufficiency that had characterised their history. Planting wherever they went marked an important action for Palestinians, not only to prevent the recurrence of such suffering but also to restore a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency for a people that once thrived on its ability not only to produce sustenance but to treat food-making as an art.

As I read reports from Gaza about people grappling with forced starvation – unable to secure flour for bread, struggling to prepare a decent meal to nourish their families, and losing children to hunger – the anguished look and expressions of my grandmother while recounting the desperate days of famine persistently come to mind.

The Haganah militia laid siege on her village from around June 1948 to April 1949. During this time, those who challenged the blockade and tried to bring supplies to the village were either killed or forcibly disappeared; one of them was my grandfather, who disappeared and was never heard from again.

Not only were there no supplies entering the village, but also the Haganah fighters deliberately destroyed food storages, slaughtered cows and sheep, and burned fields of wheat and orchards of grapes, apples and apricots. My memories of my grandmother’s face as she recounted these hardships become a window into the emotions that accompany the struggle for existence – the feelings of desperation and helplessness, and the crushing weight of responsibility to provide for loved ones.

Excerpted: ‘Palestinian suffering and

endurance in Gaza echo the Nakba’.

Courtesy: Aljazeera.com