**Gaza as a metaphor**

Yosefa Loshitzky

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“Gaza as a Metaphor and the Right to be Human”, was the title of a paper that I wrote for a conference on International Law and the State of Israel: Legitimacy, Responsibility and Exceptionalism that took place in Cork, Ireland from March 31-April 2, 2017. Due to health issues, I was not able to attend the conference in person and my paper was read by my husband.

From what I learnt afterwards, it stirred some emotions and, as expected, I was even accused (not for the first time) of being an anti-Semite and a Holocaust denier by a Christian attendee. I also found out later that the label ‘jihadist’ was used to vilify me in some Israeli websites whose mission is to mark and label as ‘traitors’ Jewish people, and particularly Israeli Jews, critical of Israel.

The accusation of being a Holocaust denier is beyond the grotesque. I was named Yosefa after my mother’s father Yosef, who was murdered in Treblinka, perhaps the most horrific Nazi extermination camp in Poland. My mother was the only survivor of her family.

Only today, it occurred to me to look at the text of my paper, written in 2017 and referring mostly to the assault on Gaza in 2014. Going through the text again felt uncanny. A strange feeling of deja vu with some past horror ‘show’ that is currently being exponentially accelerated, multiplied and intensified in its ferocity, cruelty and velocity. The following is the original text of my 2017 paper:

I would like to start by saying that despite the title of my paper I am fully aware that Gaza is not only a metaphor, but also a very harsh reality deliberately created and perpetuated by Israel. But metaphors can provide a useful way of exploring and understanding complex situations. Metaphors can also help to mobilise social and political protests and struggles.

In this paper I argue that Israel’s murderous assaults on Gaza over the last few years constitute a formative political moment, “the Gaza moment” which was manifested in a variety of ways including the 2009 students’ occupation movement and the growing calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

Gaza as a site of extreme suffering inflicted by the state of Israel on the Palestinian people can be interpreted as a metaphor for a prison, a ghetto, a refugee camp, a space/state of exception in the spirit of Giorgio Agamben’s theorisation, an experimental laboratory for exercising total control and surveillance, a ground zone for a futuristic warfare and a showcase for arms trade.

The attacks on Gaza introduce an apocalyptic vision of the present and the near present, a cataclysm of disaster capitalism where America’s “war on terror” through its proxy Israel can be more accurately described as America’s war on the world, a war, which as Mike Davies powerfully demonstrates, is specifically targeted against “the ‘feral, failed cities’ of the Third World – especially their slum outskirts,” where “the distinctive battlespace of the twenty-first century” (according to the Pentagon doctrine) will take place.

Gaza as a metaphor suggests that the “war” between gated Israel and ghettoized Palestine, applies to the current and future fortress globe, produced, perpetrated and perpetuated by the security sector.

Gaza as a metaphor introduces the true face of the “clash of civilisations”, the battle of the civilised West against the dark and barbarian forces incarnated according to the moral discourse of the “free world” by asylum seekers, refugees, and the poor, the “criminals” and the “terrorists” in the post 9/11 planet.

Gaza as a metaphor transcends the local specificity of the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict and becomes relevant to a broad matrix of glocal struggles for justice.

Gaza, thus, acts as a mirror reflecting for different dispossessed groups their own local resistance and connects it with other similar acts of resistance in different parts of the globe. The appropriation of Gaza into the protest of the African American people in Ferguson in defiance of police brutality and racism is only one case in point.

Gaza as a metaphor opens a space for reading how the struggles of native Indigenous peoples and oppressed people all over the globe intertwine and how communities and cultures can and should resist their erasure.

Gaza as a metaphor enhances Paul Gilroy’s critique of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where, as he argues, “Advocacy on behalf of Indigenous and subjugated peoples does not … merit more than token discussion as a factor in shaping how the idea of universal human rights developed and what it could accomplish.”

Gaza as a metaphor represents, perhaps, the most extreme contemporary attempt to dehumanise a whole group of people turning them, in the perceptive words of Dr Mads Gilbert, the Norwegian doctor who volunteered to help al-Shifa Hospital during the recent attacks, into “untermenschen”, the word used by the Nazis to designate what they regarded as undesired sub-humans (Jews, Roma, Blacks, etc) who deserve to be exterminated.

Dr Gilbert’s observation was echoed by a Palestinian academic who visited the Yarmouk camp in Syria on a humanitarian mission and who said “I think sometimes that we do not belong to this world, that the Palestinian people are not part of humanity.”

“IDF should be given the Nobel Peace Prize … for fighting with unimaginable restraint,” said Ron Dermer, the Israeli ambassador to the US at the Christian United for Israel summit in Washington. Dermer’s shameless statement attempts, of course, to mask the crimes against humanity committed by Israel in Gaza.

Yet, in his plea to the world to stop Israel’s criminal attack on Gaza, Dr Gilbert uttered strong words on Israel’s abuse of words, in particular its invocation of the notion of “war of defence” to describe its atrocities. His attribution of designed cruelty to the Israeli war machinery, not surprisingly, resulted in Israel’s decision to ban this amazing human being from entering the Gaza Strip until his death.

The irony embedded in this ban cannot escape people who know Hebrew and are intimately familiar with Israel’s racist culture. Lech le Aza (literally: “go to Gaza” and metaphorically “go to hell”) is a common slang expression in Hebrew. Indeed, it is Israel that deliberately created this hell.

To use Noam Chomsky’s words, Israel consciously employed “calculated sadism”. “Deliberate cruelty” an expression used by Talal Asad in his discussion of what he calls “redeeming the human through human rights” is another way to metaphorise Israel’s “defence doctrine”.

The Dahiya doctrine (increased deterrence) is part of this “deliberate cruelty”. As Sara Roy explains in her analysis of the 2008-9 onslaught on Gaza, one of the reasons for the war on Gaza was “to enhance Israel’s deterrence capacity, particularly after its defeat in Lebanon in July 2006, and to rehabilitate Israel’s image as an effective ally in the American-led war against terror”.

Excerpted: ‘Gaza as a global metaphor for reclaiming justice’. Courtesy: Aljazeera.com