

## Skies Over Israel

First of the Month

A Website of the radical Imagination

November 1, 2023 by Karen Alkalay-Gut

Maybe if they stopped bombing us, we'd stop bombing them...If they have a million displaced persons, we have 150,000 families looking for places to stay because of the rockets. If we have fewer casualties, it's because we have a warning system that they could have built as well. And sometimes pieces of shattered rockets fall on us, so we stay sheltered for 10 minutes. We scurry out and scurry back in.

The 239 hostages have still to be identified and listed — none of them are guilty of a single crime — almost a quarter are still in diapers, or back in diapers. They all have families — some still alive — who know nothing about their physical state much less their mental state. These are to be exchanged for 1000 or so prisoners who were arrested because they tried to kill us. This seems like a strange imbalance, but, okay, we would do it. Unfortunately, they have shown no sign of interest — except for their release of two Americans and two old ladies, no word has come from them even of identification. So we do the math, trying to find DNA in what is left of the 1400 bodies, of which less than 400 were military, and subtract the dead from the missing. The foreign bodies are the hardest — tracing their DNA has been a difficult task. In any case, all have lost their identity. Ronny Someck describes it in this way:

### I Am the Severed Head You Do Not Know

My hair is more blond than the sand it rolls over  
On my lips crowd words  
sharp as the knife  
that met my throat.  
You who are mesmerized by my eyes,  
put a chip on the wheel of fortune  
that spins under the eyebrows.  
Don't ask my name and imagine my hands  
hugging the body that was so beautiful  
beneath my neck  
and now cast upon the disgrace of the earth  
as if it was no more than a banana peel.

The sun shone, the poet wrote,  
and I am barely a model of darkness.  
No more.

I don't think sufficient accurate information has reached the West to allow a reasonable judgement on what should be done. Sure, we don't get all the information either. For example, we haven't seen footage of the massacre in the areas down south — no rapes, no beheadings, no fetuses ripped from their terrified mothers. We just hear a few of the stories that survivors tell.

We have 4 tv channels: One is so rightist that I can't bear to watch it, the others have Arab commentators, moderators, photographers, and guests — almost in proportion to the population of people living here. I'm watching Lucy Aharish (who begins her broadcast with 'masa el nur' (good evening in Arabic) right now as I write because I feel I must know whatever I can at any given moment.

The sirens, about half a dozen a day in the general area where I live, keep me on my toes about immediate threats. In the past, Israeli rockets over Gaza were always preceded by a warning, in the absence of a Gazan siren system. We called it "A Knock on the Roof," but we've stopped that now as we don't want the Hamas leaders we are aiming at to escape.

Sometimes I watch CNN or news in France to get a bigger picture. I still can't absorb anything because I'm not able to concentrate, and I worry about all the people who are suffering because of the brutality of Hamas, and the unpredictability of Hizballah. Orit calls to ask Ezi if a half a ton bomb from Hizballah would flatten her house. He says yes, but assures her it won't come to that because we'd flatten Lebanon if they tried. Just before that Joe calls from the States to ask if it's true that we're rounding up local Arabs. I hope not — because I have an appointment tomorrow with an Arab doctor, and I want to pick up my prescriptions from an Arab pharmacist first, and some of my neighbors are Arab, and — oh, I forgot to write one of my aged Arab colleagues to see how he is faring. He just had a quadruple bypass and should be avoiding stress.

And just to top it off, our government isn't functioning, and if it hadn't been for the organization of the protest movements, who the day before had been demonstrating for a just democracy, I don't know what would have happened. They immediately transferred their attention to collecting food, tents, clothing, and toiletries for the growing displaced population, and organizing pleas to bring the hostages home.

Here's a poem by Ronny Someck to provide a sense of the situation:

### **In the Clothing Donation Depot for Survivors. Expo, Tel Aviv**

I sort bras and learn the difference  
between the lacy padded one  
and one that is soft-lined underwired cotton.  
War is a time of shame  
and I'm not Charles Bukowski, who surely would have  
tried to identify from whom it was removed and on whom  
it will be put on.  
I just stuff a pile into a used carton  
of chocolate bars  
and then pass on to the next pile.

(Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut)

Me, I began by cleaning out our building's shelter — ensuring accessibility for passersby — and working on getting the people even older than me down the narrow steps. Then there's the kids — no school to distract them from the fact that our lives have been turned upside down and we're grateful for the fact that we've survived so far.

I was born in a rocket attack on London, and have lived through a few wars since then, and they are blending together in my mind. The only thing that's clear in a situation like this is that somebody wants to kill me.

### **Regenerating**

No sex in wartime,  
I always say.  
Even a touch of foreplay  
brings on the rockets  
that give it to us all at once.

Afterward,  
everyone who can  
makes babies  
and give them names  
in memory of