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An Obituary for Fatima Hassouna

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An obituary written in poetic verse for Palestinian writer and photographer Fatima Hassouna, composed by her friend Haidar Al-Ghazali. Translated from the Arabic by Roba Alsalibi.

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On April 16, 2025, amid Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, Palestinian photographer and writer Fatima Hassouna was killed, along with ten members of her family. Her friend, Palestinian writer Haidar Al-Ghazali, wrote this obituary to mourn her death. Fatima was deeply loved by everyone who knew her. She was a whole life taken from us, violently and far too soon. Obituary writing, or elegiac mourning, has historically been considered one of the traditional genres of Arabic poetry, associated with expressions of grief, remembrance, and commemoration of the dead.

Fatima asked me to write her obituary,
a heavy task that no text can do justice.
I cannot fathom Fatima's passing,
nor our city's loss of one of its most lucid voices.
I do not believe it, because life suited her more—
her dreams, which she drew gradually
with every image,
every poem,
and every song.
She was the image and the poem,
and the soft humming of a bird in the early morning.

I refuse to believe it.
I remember when we met again during the genocide, after a long time.
We spoke about the Gaza we loved—without reason,
without justification,
without understanding why we loved a city that kills us every day.
We walked in Al-Sahaba market with a friend.
She said, jokingly, "You now have a literary agent, Haidar. Let's celebrate!"
It was a time of starvation,
the warplanes hovering above us,
and there was nothing to celebrate except a slush drink.
We drank it while walking,
as if we owned the whole world.

I remember when she once visited my house during the genocide to film a journalistic story.
She sat with my mother for a long time,
then promised it would not be the only visit.
Fatima,
I am still waiting for you to come again.

I don't believe her departure.
I flip through our conversations, which now take on new meanings.
I found a message where she makes a prayer for me:
"I hope to see you go far. I will tell my children about you—I will tell them to be like you."

It didn't matter that they became like me.
I lingered on the word "children" for a long time.
I saw a mother teaching her child life,
taking beautiful photos of him—
of his first birthday,
of his first steps.

Fatima liked taking photos of hands.
I'm certain she would have photographed his hand holding hers on the road.

I linger on the word "children," and I imagine how green the air would be with her smile,
how content her heart would have been with her fiancé,
and the love the genocide killed before it could be fulfilled.
I imagine the wrong we would do Fatima if we do not see her killing for what it was—
with all its pain,
with the children who will never come to life,
with the love that was shattered.
I imagine the injustice we would do her
if we do not see her death itself as a massacre.

Fatima is part of a large generation in Gaza bidding farewell to itself.
A generation that life has slowly shaped
and that knows exactly what it wants.
A generation that has never heard airplanes except those that kill,
that has never known the meaning of travel except by closing its eyes before the sea.
A generation that includes the poet, the artist, the photographer, and the singer.
A generation that holds the energy to create immense beauty,
for a world that only needed to look once to see how much we are like them.

There are those you know, and those you don't—
and I promise I won't wait for their departure for you to know them.
The land betrays us; it kills the dreams within us.
So we write wills that no one in their sixties would write elsewhere in the world.
We say what Fatima always said:
"Survival might be that we don't survive, Haidar."

The Israeli occupation killed Fatima, along with ten members of her family.
They killed her brutally because she dreamed, because she laughed.
They killed her because she was real,
because she photographed, wrote, and sang.
Nothing else.

Competing Interests

The author and translator have no competing interests to declare.