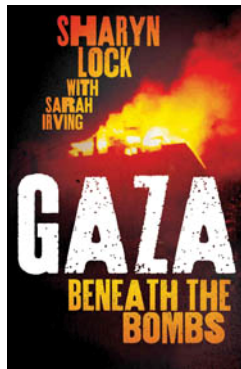


Sharyn Lock with Sarah Irving, Gaza. Beneath the Bombs. Afterword by Richard Falk, Pluto Press, London-New York 2010, 226 p., \$ 20.



„Everything I have seen suggests the Israeli army doesn't even understand the concept of 'innocent civilians'“. This sentence by the authors summarizes in a nutshell the horrific onslaught by the Israeli army on a helpless and defenseless civilian population at the turn of the year 2008/2009. The killing ratio was 100:1 to the disadvantage of Palestinians. According to Israeli soldiers who testified anonymously for the website „Breaking the silence“, the Gaza Strip was a free-fire zone. On the Gaza battlefield the Israeli army used hyper-modern weaponry in civilian areas, destroying educational institutions, medical facilities, UN buildings, mosques, electricity generators, and a vast number of homes.

Besides the reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights Organizations, and the „Goldstone Report“ there have been eye-witness reports by members of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), like the one by Sharyn Lock and Sarah Irving or the one by Vittorio Arrigoni's book „Stay Human“, who stayed with the locked-in population, showing their solidarity by risking their own lives. These eye-witness reports are „impressive“ documentations of an army that lost all moral standards. After the attack on Gaza, defense minister Ehud Barak said: „I also have no doubt in my heart that the IDF is the most moral army in the world.“ In the light of the killings (1 400) and the vast devastation caused by the Israeli army, the statement seems out of touch with reality.

In her introduction, Sarah Irving describes the emergence of the ISM in 2001, which aims to support and strengthen the Palestinian popular resistance by providing „international protection and a voice with which to nonviolently resist an overwhelming military occupation force“. The „internationals“ accompany farmers to their fields in order to protect them from extremist settlers who try to destroy the harvest. In 2002 some ISMers ended up as human shields with Yassir Arafat in his Ramallah compound, others in the church of the Nativity or in refugee camps. This political commitment can be very dangerous as the deaths of Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall in the Gaza Strip have demonstrated. Rachel Corrie was deliberately run over by a Caterpillar bulldozer and Tom Hurndall was shot to death.

In „Breaking the Siege“, the authors describe the actions of the ISMers and the Free Gaza Movement to circumvent the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip that lasted from December 14, 2004 to November 18, 2008.. From the start, the government of Israel tried to prevent ISMers from entering Israel and thus to the Occupied Territories. Some of them were expelled and denied reentry. Despite all the hardship, which was inflicted upon the ISMers by the Israel occupation forces, it did not discourage ISM volunteers. The most spectacular actions of the Free Gaza Movement were the hiring of the ships „Free Gaza“ and „Liberty“ that brought desperately needed medicine and additional ISMers to the besieged Gaza Strip.

The two most shocking chapters of the book are „The Sky Falls In“, which describes the horrors inflicted by the Israel army lasting from December 27, 2008 to January 4, 2009, and „No Safe Place“, which documents the period from January 5 to January 16, 2009. During these periods, even hospitals were unsafe, as illustrated by the burning of Al Quds hospital from which patients had to be evacuated with their beds into the street. UN staff and facilities, which were not used or abused by Hamas, as confirmed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, were also attacked.

The this diary's afterword by Richard Falk, an eminent US-American scholar in international law and since 2008 acting as a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, he writes: „How the Israeli psyche can stand its role as cruel perpetrator of such

an orgy of suffering inflicted on an entrapped civilian population of whom more than half are children has become a grotesque mystery for me." Falk writes that the book's real achievement is to convey the wisdom of the great Jewish thinker Abraham Hechel: „Few are guilty, but all are responsible.“

The furious repudiation of the „Goldstone Report“ by Israeli government officials confirms the old adage that „truth hurts“. Should the report make its way into the UN Security Council, the US government should, hopefully, not use its veto to obstruct the cause of justice. Beside the official reports concerning the Israeli onslaught on the Gaza Strip, Vittorio Arrigoni's book „Stay Human“ and the present book could in future be used as evidence at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, should the responsible be brought to justice. Sharyn Lock leads the readers deep into the „hell“ of Gaza and provides a human visage to abstract victims of state brutality.

Ludwig Watzal