

The Enemy Has a Name

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Of this ancient Phoenician city which once chose to lock its gates and burn itself to the ground rather than be invaded, of the crusader's sea fortress sacked and recaptured many a time, of the Souks and the old town, my mind is absorbed elsewhere. Of the enemy's threat to turn back the hands of time 20 years; my thoughts are fixated on a single spot, a single house that had been bombed many a time, and rebuilt many a time.

They were sitting in the living room, across from each other on the couch, chatting. They had refused to leave. A bomb stormed right through the double layered ceiling, and exploded right in the space in between. I named my first doll *Wataniyeh*. I was two or three. It was 1985. I was not born a nationalist, but next to "the enemy", *Al haraka al wataniya* (or the nationalist movement) was perhaps the second most repeated phrase on television. And so I called her that. *Wataniyeh*. She was never extravagantly dressed, in fact almost always without a dress like a true comrade. That is how I best remember her.

The enemy has a name, but in our newspapers the enemy is known as "the enemy". In our television broadcasts it is also "the enemy". As the situation remains "not

yet ripe", over a quarter of the population is displaced; over a thousand are dead, and over 4000 have been wounded like check pawns on a battlefield with seemingly loftier ends. "Birthpangs".

"Birthpangs" reverberated across the country. "Birthpangs" reverberated in the form of GBU 28 laser-guided bombs and missiles. "Birthpangs" reverberate still in the form of unexploded cluster bombs and depleted uranium munitions courteously left behind by the enemy, something to remember him by.

July 2006. My 24th birthday. Twenty four years ago I was born with the enemy's bombs as midwife. 1982. Lebanon was under siege then, also in "self-defense". My mother gave birth to me in a semi-deserted hospital in Saida. There were no nurses on the floor. The doctor's wife kindly cooked her meals instead.

Twenty four years later, the country is again under siege. By virtue of historical victimhood, the enemy stands in our midst yet again. Teta and Jiddo again refuse to move. They survived 15 years of civil war, they will not leave now, Jiddo tells me. Flyers had been thrown onto Saida over the weekend demanding that the inhabitants make

way for the enemy to launch its assaults. Seventy thousand refugees had flocked into the city. Two Palestinians had settled in the garden outside, and a family of seven from Mayfadoun had settled on the ground floor. They were all not moving.

"*Samidoun, samidoun,*" teta tells me over the phone, proud of the resistance's resilience. "They fought like heroes," residents of the South would exclaim in the aftermath of the incursions.

I planned to go in. "People are making their way in the reverse direction," she stormed. "I would rather die than see you cross through Amman! I have enough on me as is, the last thing I need is yet another of my children here!"

War will not wait. While we are seeking "answers", time will not stop. Every moment is a betrayal. "Operation Truthful Promise." On this battlefield, "the chosen people" will now meet "the Party of God". The quid pro quo soon becomes "Beirut for Tel Aviv".

"If they attack Beirut, we will leave," they promised. "Don't worry, everything is perfectly fine here. Your mother went to the hairdresser's today and I went for a walk," he reassured me.

"I remembered the tactics well. "We will play a game now. Are you ready?" I nodded. "Next time you hear a sound, you will close your ears, and we will see who closes their ears faster. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

I nodded. "Ok one, two, three go." I immediately clasped my hands to my ears, laughing in victory as the sound shook the building. I jumped when the corridor mirror broke. It must have been 1987 or 1988.

I nodded again over the phone in response to his reassurances. "And half the country is in Broumana and Faara partying?" I asked in disbelief.

"They feel this war is not theirs to fight. They did not ask for Hizbollah to cross the border, kill eight and kidnap two soldiers."

"They did it before in 2000 and it was followed by a prisoner exchange in 2004. An invasion in response, on the other hand, is premeditated war. Collective punishment, on such a disproportionate scale, would never have been accepted by the world community had the groundwork

not been laid through the new discourse/logic brought about by the war on- "

"Shhhhh, these conversations are not to be made over the phone," mom interrupted taking over the receiver.

Had it not been for the current narratives that depict tales of "merchants" and "quartets" of terror, the world would have stopped at the mention of thousands of deaths and injuries, of displacement and massacres and pure terror. Or do they, when inflicted upon others, cease to be recognized as terror?

Terror then becomes a justified means to an end. It becomes an "ethical duty". "We will continue pursuing them. This is our ethical duty with respect to ourselves. And we have no intention whatsoever of apologizing or asking for permission to do this," the enemy confirms.

It is then an "ethical duty" to inflict the terror to end all terrors, reminiscent of the "war to end all wars". As if this is the first "war on terror", the first attempt to right a wrong with another wrong to make a right. As if history never happened, and history's narratives are to the present blasphemous.

"I was driven out of my country because of them. They had no right. I do not want resistance. I do not want Arab nationalism. I do not want Arabs. I only want my country. I want to live here, and I want to stay here. Why is that so difficult to understand?" a friend hurled at me in a pub in Gemayzeh two weeks after the war, waiting for his papers to move to Dubai. His company had relocated during the war and he too now had to leave.

"We have come to internalize the mentality of the defeated. We can not rebuke Goliath, and so we blame David for provoking Goliath," I responded.

"Only in this context Goliath is David. Goliath will never present himself except as David. Our Goliath is Goliath because he suffered as David suffered, because he is David. The timeline stops there. The story stops there. The roles stop there. Everything else is outside of history. There is no room for more."

"Fact remains David has become Goliath. We do not insert our stories into a historical space, we make history. We write it."

"Lebanon has paid enough of a price already. We need not pay more. We've paid our dues to this cause and to many others. And what divine victory, where do they see the victory?" he continued in disbelief at the more than a million people who had marched in celebration that day.

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"Claims of victory are merely part of a propaganda war by both parties," I responded.

"30,000 homes destroyed, over a thousand dead, four thousand injured, a quarter displaced, 200,000 still displaced, more than 100,000 unexploded ordinances scattered across the South, 15,000 tons of oil spill and \$2 billion worth of damaged infrastructure, where is the victory?"

"Fact remains they went into the war to dismantle Hizbollah. Hizbollah is now more popular than ever before. Now you tell me, where is their victory?"

"But at what price?"

"At not too severe a price apparently; 20,000 rockets are still left," I joked. He laughed.

People still laughed. The sea was not black but intensely blue, and to the foreigners only one message that rose amidst the debris, in Dahyeh as in the South, "Made in America."

"How can you claim victory when you were a state within a state in southern Lebanon, and now you're going to be replaced by an international force?" the American President sarcastically exclaimed.

It was the hundreds of thousands of Southerners who refused to be "replaced", flocking the streets southbound on the eve of the ceasefire. If there no longer were houses to return to, they built tents in their stead. "The city of loy-

alty remains steadfast in its loyalty" read one poster. The yellow flag fluttered atop mountains of rubble and furniture.

"You are the first car that passes through this road since the fighting ended. The roads were inaccessible before," says an old woman from Bint Jbeil, as bulldozers were stubbornly clearing the rubble next to her.

The next village, Maroun Erras, overlooks the end of the "State within a State", and the first beginnings of the state within another nation. The lush mountains clearly demarcate the borders, from behind which the enemy continues to wage its peace.

The number of friends who have been relocated, the number of countries through which we continue to communicate, the number of people who are still looking to leave, a shadow country is coming into existence abroad.

The sea remains sprawled at the feet of the old Phoenician state, as its waves slowly play with the city, advancing and then retreating only to come back again. Things remain as we left them. Time continues to cast its tentacles as they stealthily draw their relics, cautiously casting layer after layer. War accentuates times markings, casting its own layers on the faces of those we leave behind. For those of us who do not continuously bear witness, they will not camouflage.

Now the enemy wills its name back. It will soon extend its hand. The enemy is the one "civilized" beacon of hope in the region. The enemy wants peace.

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