

# THE DRONE EATS WITH ME

A GAZA DIARY  
ATEF ABU SAIF



FOREWORD BY NOAM CHOMSKY





Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July

## Watching the Game

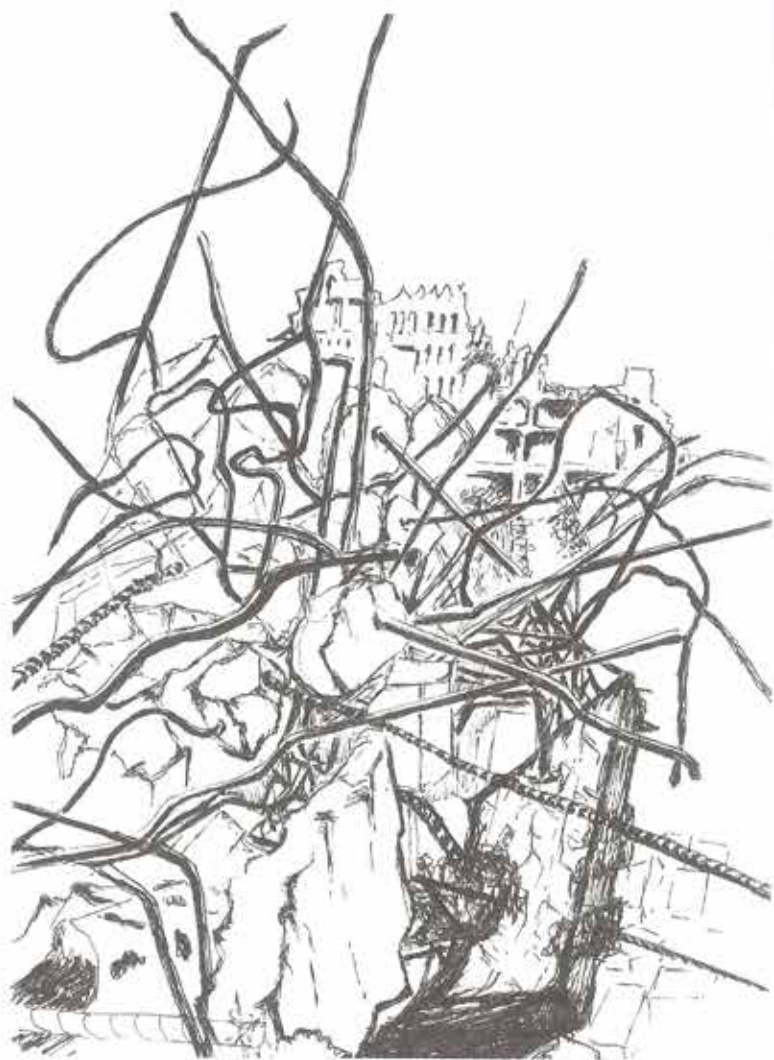
LAST NIGHT, WHILE my friends and I were watching the second semi-final between Netherlands and Argentina at my friend Ayman's place in the Kasasib area of the camp, another group of men were doing the same in a small café on the beach of Khan Younis. Their café was called 'Sahar Al-Layali' which means 'staying up all night'.<sup>21</sup> Like us, they were smoking shisha, cheering for their favorite team, complaining about big players making obvious mistakes, putting their hands on their heads at near misses and close calls. They could hardly have been thinking about that gunship out there in the darkness, watching them, or the anger it stored, as they cheered and shouted at the match. They could hardly have imagined its maw, the gaping mouth of its gun turret, salivating with hunger for their souls.<sup>22</sup>

Six of them were killed instantly, another 14 maimed. Their blood must have covered the sand all around the café, then slowly started to trickle down to the sea. The red charcoals from the top of their shisha pipes must have blown up into the night sky, then descended, still flaming, like falling stars. By the morning, three of the injured had joined the dead. They never lived to watch the final of the World Cup. None of their favourite players will ever hear about their death.

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21. After the song by the Lebanese singer, Fairuz (Nouhad Wadi Haddad).

22. The victims of this attack were later reported to be Mohammed Khalid Qanann (25) and his brother Ibrahim Qanann (24), Mohammad Al-'Aqad (24), Suleiman al-Astal (55), Hamdi Kamel Sawali, Ahmad Sawali, Ibrahim Sawali, Salim Sawali, Ahmed al-Astal and Musa al-Astal (ages all unknown).



Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July

## Floodlit City

THERE ARE FLOODLIGHTS, lightning strikes, searchlights... lights on all sides.

Flashes.

Thunderous explosions.

The building shakes. The glass panes of each window shatter, one by one. The frames creak into new positions, their metal splitting.

Darkness is a ghoul that grinds and chews and gnaws at our calm. Worry courses through our veins. Uncertainty bites into our rest.

Another explosion, nearer than the others. Then the sound of windows blowing out, scattering shards across the floor. I flinch and can't tell if some of the fragments have implanted into me, or if I've imagined it. I run to the children but they are still sleeping safely. I turn on the radio. Turn it up loud.

The reporter Mohamed al-Battish declares: 'More explosions in al-Zarka district. Two missiles.'

The reporter Mohamad al-Ashkar: 'An explosion in al-Tiwam quarter.'

What about the explosion that just blew out our windows!?

A third reporter: 'I am now standing in the western part of north Gaza. Israeli warplanes have attacked a building near to the Karama Hospital, east of the Karama Towers.'

It seems he's referring to the same attack as Al-Ashkar but from a different perspective.

## Central Gaza



Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August

## Back Home

LAST NIGHT WAS our first night back at the apartment. It was good to be home. The drones welcomed us, unsurprisingly, with their constant whirring all night long. If you allow yourself to listen to them, you'll never sleep. So I did my best to ignore them, which was hard. In the dark, you can almost believe they're in your bedroom with you, behind the curtains, above the wardrobe. You imagine that, if you wave your hand above your face, you might catch it in your hand or even swat it as you would a mosquito.

Nonetheless, it's still good to be home in our own space. There's something about the smell of it, the texture of daily life as it used to be, our familiarity with the space, the ease with which we relax there, the privacy. Being home makes us realise life goes on.

Hanna has spent the day cleaning the apartment. Hisham's family left the place perfectly tidy but Hanna is obsessed with her belongings and having the apartment the way she likes it. She has decided to go through everything and give it another clean, from the carpet to the airing cupboard. Soap and water are being carried to every room in the apartment. She washes the kitchen utensils, the clothes, the tables, the surfaces. All the bed linen is taken out and piled up. During their stay, only my library was out of bounds for Hisham's family. Hisham kept it locked most of the time but confesses to occasionally creeping in to read the odd book. I missed it myself. I survey the room, so glad to be back in it – the shelves, the desk, the souvenirs, the paintings on the wall, even the imprint of me on the chair from the last time I sat there reading. Being back

*'Witnessed, lived, and recorded page by page. A searing account of living through the 2014 bombardment of Gaza. We who report it can never capture the true scale of individual and collective suffering. As a Gaza resident, Atef Abu Saif's diary provides an insight no outsider could ever have achieved.'*

– Jon Snow, Channel 4 News

On 7 July 2014, in an apparent response to the murder of three teenagers, Israel launched a major offensive against the Gaza Strip, lasting 51 days, killing 2145 Palestinians (578 of them children), injuring over 11,000, and demolishing 17,200 homes.

The global outcry at this collective punishment of an already persecuted people was followed by widespread astonishment at the pro-Israeli bias of Western media coverage. The usual news machine rolled up, and the same distressing images and entrenched political rhetoric were broadcast, yet almost nothing was reported of the on-going lives of ordinary Gazans – the real victims of the war.

One of the few voices to make it out was that of Atef Abu Saif, a writer and teacher from Jabalia Refugee Camp, whose eye-witness accounts (published in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere) offered a rare window into the conflict for Western readers. Here, Atef's complete diaries of the war allow us to witness the full extent of last summer's atrocities from the most humble of perspectives: that of a young father, fearing for his family's safety, trying to stay sane in an insanely one-sided war.

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*'In this luminous account of Israel's 2014 invasion of Gaza, Atef Abu Saif creates a literary equivalent to Goya's Disasters of War. The Drone Eats with Me deserves to become a modern classic of war literature.'*

– Molly Crabapple

*'A devastating contemporary war journal. This is what war is like in the 21st century.'*

– Michael Ondaatje