

Spring in Gaza

William M. Cotter

The University of Arizona

Summary:

In May 2013 I traveled to the Gaza Strip to conduct fieldwork for my Masters degree. I gained entry to Gaza during a period of relative political calm six months after the 2012 war and shortly before the Egyptian military removed Mohamed Morsi from power in Cairo. This poem reflects my most salient memories from that time: the sights, the people, and the experiences.

Keywords: Gaza, Refugees, Palestine, Poetry, Migration

Spring in Gaza

Drinking Lipton yellow label tea at Rafah crossing, flies swarming,
the heat of the sun increases.

Bodies amass as the gates open;
crossing begins, slowly.

An aging Mercedes taxi aches, pulling away from the border.
Farmland gives way to refugee camp, refugee camp blends to city.
The scene repeats.

Shuhadaa Street: expensive cars, grocery stores, highrise buildings,
power outages, and tainted water.

Abdul Malik, a lawyer, sits on the land that he farms;
concrete boxes in the distance, military lookouts.
His brother died where we're sitting, shot by an Israeli sniper
during 'Operation Pillar of Defense'.

Drinking coffee in Bassem's courtyard,
he's on strike because his salary is being held in limbo in Ramallah.
He points to the gate of his courtyard,
"They drove a tank down our street and parked it there".
His son is a student in the United States.

I sit with Dina who tells me about 1948.

Cheap plastic chairs and thin mattresses cover her floor.

Fleeing Jaffa, the Bride of the Sea,

she pauses and asks if I want to hear a poem.

Salma's father takes me to his workshop in Nuseirat.

His ironwork is breathtaking.

Salma's mother hands me a flower from the garden.

We sit in one of Gaza's seaside cafés.

The power goes out, as it often does.

The waiters turn on the generators, and the light comes back.

Everyone stands and everyone is silent, because Mohammed Assaf,
the boy from Khan Younis, is on Arab Idol.

In the early morning I sit silently as the driver heads towards Rafah.

With hundreds of travelers attempting to leave Gaza, I wait until the bus comes.

Crossing begins again, slowly.

We stop in the no-mans land between Gaza and Egypt.

For hours we sit, pray, smoke, and drink coffee.

My bags full with bottles of olive oil

that Salma's mother handed me as I left.