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Gaza Strip, Factor 15: Human Rights

The Gaza Strip: Collaborative Medicine to Promote Conflict Resolution and Structural Connectivity

“The spirit of Gaza is in the cafés where narghile-smoking patrons discuss the latest political news; it’s in the crowded alleyways where children play; in the markets where women shop and then rush back to their families; in the words of the old men shuffling back across the street to meet their friends, fingering worry beads and regretting the losses of the past” (Abuelaish).

Nearly two million Palestinians inhabit the Gaza Strip, a small sliver of land that encompasses just one hundred and forty square miles of Israeli territory. This partially landlocked slice of Israel is controlled by its original inhabitants, the population of Palestinians that once swelled beyond its borders across the Middle East. The Muslim Palestinians that survive within the cultural enclave that Gaza provides are socially isolated from the international community, denied access to the resources they need to survive and the global connections needed to gain and maintain political agency in a tumultuous social climate. The atmosphere in Gaza is war-torn and almost dystopian, Gazans live deprived of every creature comfort and the intangible joy of stability and security, are barred from the privileges that lie just out of reach beyond the border.

The cause of Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deep-seated and complex, fundamentally derived from the religious divide between Islam and Judaism - the faith upheld by Israelis (Marks). Ideation that supports inherent racial and cultural divides stokes the flames of conflict and provides fodder for dehumanization. Both religious groups feel a strong sense of ownership over Jerusalem - a city sacred within the doctrinal texts of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Brutal territorial conquest by Israeli forces has stranded many Palestinians in a state of physical and emotional indigence, constantly in need of nourishment.

When considering the cause of Palestinian plight, a distinct form of panacea is made evident: conflict resolution. The sweet ambrosia of provisions and medical resources would flow smoothly, unhindered by the vitriol of Hamas - a militant ruling power in Gaza with radical anti-Israeli views - and the Israeli government. Negotiations would be facilitated, treaties signed, amicable living spaces determined - if only the tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians could be rationally compartmentalized. Of course, the way in which these changes could be successfully catalyzed is yet to be discovered. According to a 21st century Executive Report of the Food Security Assessment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the situation is dire:

Although the flow of humanitarian and development assistance from national and international bodies is substantial, it is far below the amount needed to ensure food security for all. Most assistance now is aimed at preventing people becoming more insecure. Activities are underway to maintain public servants jobs, create new jobs, provide food, cash, medical and other humanitarian assistance, repair damaged homes, rehabilitate roads and water systems, enhance productivity in agriculture, and more. But the assistance received since September 2000 has not been near enough to prevent the massive decline in per capita income, offset physical losses to property, create the jobs necessary to begin moving towards a more food secure environment or stop the decline in gross domestic product (“REPORT OF THE FOOD SECURITY”).

One space in which amicable relations may be formed has been left overlooked: the hospitals of the Middle East. A personal account from a well-respected doctor by the name of Izzeldin Abuelaish detailed hardships in the Gaza Strip, and the ways in which his journey through medical school and medical practice on the other side of the Gaza-Israel border aided him in developing a sense of empathy towards the Israeli people. His daughters were brutally murdered in an Israeli airstrike, and yet he still practices compassion towards the vulnerable Israelis under his care. When people seek medical care for physical and psychological ailments, they accept that they are deficient in some respect, they humble themselves and relinquish some of their bodily agency. The care staff within a clinic or hospital enters the healing space for the sole sake

of improving the quality of life of other humans. This dynamic between doctor and patient fosters the growth of relationships based on gratitude - the unlikely antithesis of disdain and hate.

Abuelaish discusses the nutritional deficiencies he must face as well, as they formed the lens through which he viewed his experiences: "I had vowed that once I graduated, my family would have a better home, enough to eat, and my father would know what he meant to me. I wanted him to see the fruits of his labor" (Abuelaish). Speaking on his first inquisitive experiences in a hospital setting, he notes: "However, The hospital experience left other impressions on me as well. I shared a room with a Palestinian girl whose family brought her food - quantities of food such as I've never seen in my life...They brought whole bunches of bananas. If there was ever a banana in our house my mother would cut it into equal pieces - one for each child" (Abuelaish). The recurring motif of 'fruit' serves as a physical reminder of the intangible pain and angst Abuelaish experienced as a result of the poverty and oppression his family suffered at the hands of the Israelis, connecting his experiences back to the endless physical and emotional hunger that is never satiated in places devoid of nourishment.

Abuelaish's story is not unique in the Gaza Strip. Stories of loss, fatigue and inanition run rampant in the hearts of those who call Gaza home. A woman named Sanuora was denied access to an education after age eleven as a result of her parent's finances, and now has difficulty accessing an occupation, though she lives with six mouths to feed ("The Human Face of Gaza Hardships"). She is forced to buy the cheapest and least nutritive substances for her children, which will likely lead to health problems as they age. A woman named Azza who married at age seventeen suffers from the ache of the manual labor she must perform on a daily basis to manage her household, her husband has no source of income. A young man searching for work is denied passage to the United States, but his family supports his escape to Egypt. He migrates along with many doctors who leave the country as their salaries are decimated by Hamas - the country that most craves the empowered stability and compassion of medical professionals.

In summation, medical collaboration is one way in which harmony can be achieved within the Gaza Strip. Spaces of healing will help to promote not only the health of constituents, but

enrichen the codependent aspect of the relationship between Gazans and Israelis. Education is an important agent of empowerment when considering the medical spaces and practices that can create change within the Middle East, increased availability of which will allow for distribution of knowledge that promotes peace. Ipso facto, those who devote themselves to healing, nourishing, and nurturing revile the vices that create destruction - and have the power to create the fulfillment that all of the starving yearn for in lieu of satiation.

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