

This film was commissioned by the trustees of the Imperial War Museum and was shot in Gaza in the summer of 2014, at the very beginning of Israel's war on Gaza 'Operation Protective Edge'. It had taken two years for me to find a way to access Gaza through Israel; the border with Egypt was closed and only IDF approved journalists were allowed through the Israeli Erez crossing. In that time I had been back and forth on different ideas of what I would film there, but everything I came up with seemed similar to what had been shown by documentarists and journalists. I decided that what I could offer was my viewpoint on Gaza from there in the room, or from the back of the car, and along the street. To focus our lens on what was around us, the men who escorted us, producer Kate Parker, cinematographer Emma Dalesman and I, everywhere we went, to observe what we found and to find the key to show how it felt to be there, in solidarity.

It felt remarkable to be there. After some days spent with our fixers I was offered the opportunity to meet with senior members of Hamas, and to be taken to camps where I could bear witness to the poverty and injury that was endemic, in fact we were often in the camps, we filmed there and were invited to eat there, and many of those moments are in the film, but I did not want to film images of Gazan's disaster and despair for the audience. I decided I would show a side of Gazan daily life that was invisible to the rest of the world.

We were there in a moment of dangerous calm, everyone knew an aerial bombardment was imminent, but it was unspoken. there was an artificial stillness and a charged atmosphere. When I was asked to 'finish my work and go' in a phone call from the British consulate's envoy in Gaza, the mood darkened considerably with our hosts, it felt beyond shameful to be called away for our safety, it was a crude confirmation of what was unspoken, that a huge attack was coming within days.

When I got home I decided to use silence, music and animation as well as the scenes we shot from observation to try to convey to the viewer, what it felt like, bodily and in my senses, to be in Gaza at that time. I was never in the scene but I didn't want to pretend my absence, in one section I included the sound of my breath to make my subjectivity bodily felt.

I had just been to see the animated movie *My Neighbour Totoro* at the cinema. There is a scene when Mei discovers Totoro by crawling under thick undergrowth and falling down a deep tunnel into the earth. This mysterious passage to a magical underworld seemed similar to the complex and obscure way we gained access to Gaza, and I thought enchantment was a good metaphor for the state of existence in Gaza, for the Israeli land, sea and air siege that the strip of land is under. Here enchantment is not meant in a positive way, as in 'enchanting', but means under a spell; because it exists, it existed, isolated by the world and on a different plane of reality to everything that surrounded it.

Gaza was in a sealed bubble but the incursions by Israel by air and the view from its coast of the Israeli war ships showed how permeable that bubble was. In the penultimate scene in the film, an animated black spot slowly expands over the street scene, this was a sign of the permeability of Gaza by the Israeli war machine, a sign of the violence to come.

Rosalind Nashashibi, 15th October 2023