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El Sobrante, CA
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I wrote this poem partly in response to the Israeli policy of home demolition by bulldozer. Palestinian families whose homes are targeted for destruction are notified by loudspeaker. Sometimes they're given barely half an hour to carry out their belongings and vacate their homes. Many elderly and disabled Palestinians have been buried in the rubble of their homes because they could not, or would not, leave.

I also wrote the poem in response to the many incidents in which pregnant Palestinian women have attempted to make it to hospital, only to be stopped at checkpoint by Israeli soldiers who refuse to let them pass, forcing them to either turn around and drive home or give birth at checkpoint. In either case, these births take place under circumstances of extreme stress and danger, without medical assistance, with sometimes disastrous consequences.

Both of these scenarios—women giving birth “in extremis” and Palestinian families made homeless when their houses are demolished—have become commonplace in Palestine. In my mind I've tended to view them as two separate—though obviously related—narratives, but recently it occurred to me that somewhere in Gaza or Jenin or elsewhere in Palestine, the two horrific scenarios are bound to converge, if they have not already.

THE CHOICE

“I ask you youngest citizens to believe the evidence of your eyes. You have seen that life is fragile, and evil is real, and courage triumphs. Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself, and in your days you will add not just to the wealth of your country but to its character.” -- George W. Bush

In Palestine the about-to-be
firstborn of a twenty two year old
woman roils and churns in amniotic
unease his journey having
hit a snag when check-
point soldiers deny his parents passage
thwarting all thought of
hospital birth.
They turn and drive home.

Not yet a citizen of
the human world he doesn't
see how his mother's sweat
wets the sheets glues brown hair to cheeks
nor how his father hovers: *Love I'm here*
Don't cry Doesn't hear what
his father now hears: the tanks.
If he were a born boy he'd see his father
turn on the television

loud slip from the room to race
 outdoors arms aloft pleading
No stop my wife—
 while she
 grips the mattress, arching her back.

He'd see his mother lost
 in labor oblivious to
 loudspeaker
 gunfire tanks
 She wails stops wails
 Her brown eyes fix
 on the American who sits
 at his desk amidst marvelous order—
 just a few papers in one neat stack—squinting
 back at her and speaking. The camera moves
 outdoors to gaze at the White House
 shimmering in sun. Presidential words
 vibrate glinting like tossed coins.

Courage triumphs

Look Hassan! Such green green
 grass!

Serve in a cause

And flowers! Hassan let's plant—

In those moments just as
 her body loses itself in a wild red
 flowering of flesh
 he the unseeing
 the neverborn
 he of the tiny
 bulldozed bud of a heart
 makes his choice
 and will carry it
 will carry it
 will carry it on.