

War and Gaza, Paris and Rachid Mashharawi..

A few days ago, Paris and the great film director Rachid Mashharaoui, were never far from my mind, especially on days like these last year. The images and scenes are still jumping to my head like the flashes of the mobile phone that Rachid was carrying as he took hundreds of pictures and dozens of videos of me in every corner of Paris; from the Seine River to the Eiffel Tower, Place de la Bastille, the Louvre Building, the Sacred Coeur Church, the Church of Notre Dame, Chateau Rouge, and the demonstrations square. , the most important restaurants, Pompeii de, Chatelet, Strasbourg, San Deni. . . etc.

The first lesson he told me was that you must learn how to ride the metro alone, without which you will not be able to walk around alone and remain confined to the hotel. He did not leave any important town in Paris without teaching me how to get there and then return to my place of residence in the City of Arts. Every day we walked for long hours on our feet as if he were giving me the keys to the city and revealing to me its secrets that the French themselves often did not know. He tells me the story of every house, painting, sculpture, street, and alley. He was like my savior from the deadly specter of loneliness that almost killed me. He was also present next to me during the war, despite his physical distance, every day and every hour. Thank you, my dear friend.

The scenes are still turning in my head, every corner and cranny and friend I met, especially since at the moment of displacement to Deir al-Balah, I wore the same shoes that I was wearing in Paris. Waterproof shoes made of genuine leather. I don't know why every time I bend down to tie my shoes to go to the open market or the camp market in the Monastery and see the shoes, images of Paris jump out in front of me.

Suddenly, I discovered that Gaza during the war had become very similar to Paris. For example, and not limited to, Paris is a noisy city that bustles with life and does not sleep at night. Restaurants, cafes, transportation, stores, and everything remains awake until the morning, just like Gaza. We stay up until the morning to the sounds of missiles, battleship shells, artillery, the sounds of clashes, and the sound of the buzzer that never stops.

In Paris too, there is a queue wherever you go. For example, if you want to get a ticket to enter the Louvre Museum, you must stand in line for a long time. If you want to visit the Palace of Versailles, the same queue, and to enter the Pompeii as well. Just like Gaza, if you wanted to buy a bucket of water or Saj bread, or dared to think of going to Nuseirat to fill a gas can, the queue would go from the Monastery to Nuseirat... Paris has a queue and we have queues.

As for the cleanliness of the streets in Paris, our streets are much cleaner. It is not possible, but impossible, to find a paper on the ground, a piece of wood, worn clothes, or plastic. All of these have become like treasures thrown on the ground, because everyone uses them to light a fire to cook food. The rest of the garbage, if any, will be recycled with unparalleled creativity. For example, if you are one of the lucky ones and find an oil tank made of iron, you will make from it the finest two-story oven that burns bread and cooking, and you may rent it by the hour and become wealthy. Thus, Gaza became cleaner than Paris.

As for transportation; In Paris, its residents are famous for riding bicycles, to save time, money and exercise. Just like Gaza, where most people now ride bicycles because there are no other means of transportation, other than donkeys, as for sports, we do not need it because we run day and night after a million jobs, and a million jobs run behind us.

In Paris, prices are very expensive and may be among the most expensive in the world. I used to buy an egg for half a dollar and a kilo of salt for five dollars, and I measured that. As for Gaza, we outperformed Paris with our prices. With the war, everything became more expensive than Paris. For example, a kilo of salt is close to ten dollars. A loaf of bread is about half a dollar. One egg is half a dollar. If your family has more than ten people, you will need approximately \$100 worth of food each day. Finally we found something to beat Paris.

Now Paris is decorated with its most beautiful lights, colorful colors, and everything available to make the city more beautiful, to celebrate and rejoice the arrival of the new year. The building of the Hotel de Ville, or the Paris Municipality, located in the center of the capital, is now decorated with the most beautiful lighting designs, and children are playing around it, and it has become a meeting place for tourists, families, and lovers. The Eiffel Tower hugs the sky with the most amazing lighting you will ever see. Likewise, the skies of Gaza are decorated with luminous

phosphorus bombs and fireworks from the most expensive, strong, and most powerful types of missiles in the world.

A year goes, a year comes, and every year we still dream of freedom.

From Gaza to Paris and Rashid, I miss you both.. happy new year.

2023/16/12

Ali Abu Yassin