

## **Gaza is not elsewhere. Gaza is us, when we allow ourselves to be touched by Sergio Mario Illuminato**

Yesterday, in Piazza San Giovanni in Rome, it wasn't just the heat that made us sweat. It was something else. Something that slipped beneath the skin, into the bones—a weariness that wasn't physical, but existential. Every step, every gaze, felt like walking on a wound that refuses to close. There were so many of us. Different bodies, voices from different lives. But in the center of the chest, the same void. We were there for Gaza. But maybe, even before that, we were there to not go blind.

The signs, the flags, the chants—they were all there. But what I carry with me are the eyes. Eyes that seemed to absorb light like a black hole. Eyes of those who have stopped asking for explanations, but still search for contact. For something to hold the world together as it unravels. And then, Rula. Her voice. Which wasn't just a voice—it was a fissure. She didn't speak; she opened. She let something slip into each of us. There was no need to raise her voice - just to remain. To stay with that pain that defies language.

When I embraced her, there was nothing to say. Language breaks in certain moments. What's left are bodies, the scent of skin, hands that tremble. We cried. Not theatrically. The tears ran like a slow rain inside. It was a mute language. A language made of tremors, fragility, held breath.

And it's there that I felt something I know well: that silent paradox of being still, and yet something opens up within. Like in the cinema. We sit still, but everything inside us moves. The body halts, the heart races. The muscles do nothing, but something is being excavated inside. That's what it was like in that square. Gaza wasn't out there. It was between our ribs. In the heavy air. In the hands that didn't know where to rest.

We can no longer afford to look from afar. The illusion of distance is the gravest of all crimes. We don't need rhetorical empathy- we need presence. Gaza is not a news item. It is a question that concerns us. A question that asks: *Where are you? What are you willing to lose to remain human?*

6,663 days. 18 years and 337 days. For 609 days now, the world has stopped even pretending. The genocide has become background noise. A frequency too low for those who've learned to live with indifference. And yet, every image that passes through us is not just an image. It's a fracture. An opening.

Every child beneath the rubble has a name we do not know, but that belongs to us. Every mother screaming in hunger shows us what we don't want to see: that our safety is built on distraction. That our silence weighs as much as a bomb. Politics has stopped speaking. Or maybe it still speaks, but only to cover the sound of blood.

I can no longer be silent. Not as an artist, but as a body. As a human being. Art can no longer be distraction. It can no longer describe the world without feeling the flesh. If it doesn't vibrate, if it doesn't tremble, if it isn't afraid, it's useless. It must become a place. A wound. An opening. Not a mirror, but a threshold.

Gaza, even just imagined, is a place that shrinks. A cave. A crypt. Scents that are too strong. Sounds that stay with you. A darkness that does not comfort. That's where we must enter. Not out of pity. But because in that darkness, perhaps, we can still recognize ourselves.

Like in the cinema. Where we remain motionless, and yet something tears open. We let ourselves be penetrated, dismantled. That's where an ethical space can be born. A space of sensing. We must do the same now. Unseal ourselves. Let Gaza enter us the way grief does. Without mediation. Without defenses.

There are no more governments. No more oppositions. There are bodies. There are choices. There is the possibility - and the responsibility - of not turning away. Every gesture we make, every word we speak, is a stance.

To inhabit the threshold is not a metaphor. It's an urgency. It's remaining at the point where pain meets flesh. Where the image becomes life. Where feeling becomes action. The threshold I inhabit is black. Rough. Made of the rubble barely glimpsed on the evening news. Cries that perhaps make it into talk shows only to justify the media's existence. But it's also a threshold from which to speak. A threshold from which a voice can be thrown. Not to win. Not to convince. But to remain human.

This is my voice. This is my body. This is my appeal. If it can serve, use it. If it can hurt, listen to it. If it can help remember something you had forgotten, let it in.

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