On Family Loss, Detention, and the Language of Suffering in Gaza

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> A Palestinian survivor recounts the loss of 31 family members in a single airstrike and addresses the asymmetric language used to describe Israeli hostages versus Palestinians detained or killed, arguing that terminology choices reflect unequal valuation of human life and suffering.

SAŽETAK

This testimony examines the politics of naming and language in the context of the Gaza conflict, as experienced by a speaker whose family lost 31 members in one airstrike. The speaker challenges the distinction drawn between Israeli hostages—those taken and held—and Palestinians described as prisoners, detainees, or prisoners of war, despite similar circumstances of capture and detention. Drawing on personal experience of 53 hours in detention, including blindfolding, handcuffing, and beatings, the speaker argues that terminology is not neutral but rather reflects and reinforces hierarchies of human value. The testimony highlights how linguistic choices—who is named a hostage versus a prisoner, whose suffering is publicly acknowledged versus ignored—operate as mechanisms of dehumanisation. The speaker emphasises that acknowledging equal humanity requires recognising the asymmetry in how Palestinian and Israeli suffering are framed, named, and publicly discussed across media and social platforms.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

- Thirty-one members of the speaker's family were killed in a single airstrike, a loss the speaker describes as incomprehensible.
- The speaker was detained for 53 hours, during which they were blindfolded, handcuffed, beaten, and denied medical treatment despite requesting it.
- The speaker questions why Palestinians taken from checkpoints, schools, and shelters are called prisoners or detainees while Israelis taken are designated hostages—a linguistic distinction that the speaker argues reflects unequal valuation of human life.

> The speaker did not deny that Israeli hostages are suffering or that their status as hostages is valid, but rather challenged the asymmetry in how Palestinian suffering and capture are named and acknowledged.

> Language and terminology are tools that shape how suffering is publicly recognised; the choice of words—hostage versus prisoner, victim versus terrorist—reflects and reinforces whose humanity is acknowledged.

> The speaker argues that true equal treatment of all humans requires recognising and addressing these linguistic and narrative asymmetries in how Palestinian and Israeli suffering are described across media and social platforms.

> In the context of personal and collective trauma, the speaker emphasises that the question of language and naming is inseparable from questions of survival, grief, and the valuation of human life.

ČLANAK

The Cost of Conflict: A Family's Loss

Thirty-one members of my family were killed in a single airstrike. I cannot even fully comprehend that number. When you are living through this reality, every day, the question of how to use language becomes almost secondary to the question of survival and grief.

Terminology and the Politics of Naming

I want to address the controversy around my comments about Israeli hostages, because there is a distinction being made in how people are named and described that I believe deserves scrutiny. I did not question the status of hostages as hostages. What I questioned was why Palestinians who were taken from checkpoints, from schools, from shelters—including people in my own family—are called prisoners, while Israelis who were kidnapped are called hostages. Why should Emily and other Israeli hostages receive that designation while my loved ones do not? That was my question.

I have never denied that anyone is suffering. I know that everyone is suffering—Israelis and Palestinians alike. But the language we use matters. Why are Palestinian sufferings not acknowledged in the same way? Why are we called terrorists? Why are Palestinians who have been taken called prisoners of war, while Israelis taken from Israeli territory are named hostages? Does this terminology give them more humanity because they are Israeli, while my loved ones are named prisoners and are tortured?

Personal Experience of Detention

I was kept in detention myself for 53 hours. I was blindfolded and handcuffed. I was beaten in my face. I asked the Israeli soldiers to allow me to see a doctor, and they denied me any medical treatment. No one talks about this. No one acknowledges my suffering. Why are they given the privilege of being called hostages while I am called a detainee, a prisoner—named that way across all social media and news platforms? Why am I less human than anyone else?

The Question of Equal Humanity

You suggest the better approach would be to humanize everyone, to treat all humans equally. But that is precisely my point. Do you know what I am going through every day? I cannot even know the full number of family members who were killed. Thirty-one members of my family died in one airstrike. And in the midst of this, I am being asked how to use language correctly. The language itself—the words we choose to describe people and their suffering—is part of how some lives are valued and others are not.

#Gaza conflict — family loss and casualties #Detention and torture #Language and dehumanisation #Hostage versus prisoner terminology #Asymmetric humanitarian recognition #Palestinian testimony #Human rights and dignity

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