



HAMAS. From Resistance to Government,
Paola Caridi, Seven
Stories Press, New
York 2012, 416 pp.

A book about “devils”. Or “animals”, or “cannibals”. These terms are used by a certain part of Israeli society when referring to Hamas militants. And some western journalists refer to this “disgraceful” movement in a similar vein. This terrorist organisation is a strange beast, which has, over time, become a nationalist and religious movement, then a source of leadership and finally an actual administration. Moving ‘from resistance to government’.

To explain this transformation Paola Caridi uses the tools of scientific enquiry and historical analysis without relinquishing her role as an on-the-ground reporter. Faced with the “Hamas scandal”, not just Israel but all Western governments take refuge in profanation. They don’t answer the question: why did the Palestinians vote for an organisation with a past of murderous terrorism and a charter that considers the destruction of Israel as an imperative? If Hamas is the devil, then Gaza is its hell. A strip of 360 square kilometres, home to 1.7 million human beings. Without an economy, without dignity, without hope. A prison with borders sealed by land, sea and air.

If Hamas is not the answer to the Palestinians’ legitimate aspirations, can Gaza, with its everyday life and death provide the right response? The Middle Eastern conflict feeds on too many culpable fallacies. The inextricable tangle of the crisis in this region is the legitimate child of a collective failure: the result of the militarist, neo-colonialist tendencies in Israel; the corruption and lack of leadership within the Palestinian Authority; the helplessness of the Arab world; and the impotence and hypocrisy of the West. — *F.Fusi*

Cibo&cultura: The mishmish season

by Paola Caridi

The season for apricots is very brief, Palestinians say. Just a few weeks. Barely enough time to quickly pick the fruit – which is smaller, paler and more tart than its Italian counterpart – off the tree. Indeed, apricot season is considered so fleeting that it’s over in the blink of an eye. *Bukra fil mishmish* is an Arabic saying that literally means “Tomorrow, when the *mishmish* (apricots) are in bloom”. In other words never, you’re kidding yourself. Yet that ethereal illusion is physical; this is a real fruit, with a beguiling, sour taste, akin to the bitter Italian wild oranges.

In May, when the *mishmish* are ripe, elderly Palestinian mothers quickly pick the apricots to avoid them rotting on the tree and make a paste they then spread on trays and leave to dry in the sun. At Ramadan, these sheets of apricot paste (actual sheets, a bit thicker than paper, but practically A4 size) are melted in hot water, adding sugar to taste, and sometimes rose water for extra flavouring. The result is *qamar al-Din*, one of the beverages drunk with the meal that follows ritual fasting during Ramadan.

In actual fact, dried apricots have a place in Italian holidays as well. They add colour to Christmas baskets of dried fruit and nuts. But why not exploit them more and give them a more impor-

tant role as some already do when they use them (though alas seldom) to flavour their roast pork? While apricots are popular in the Middle East as far as Morocco, it’s in the Atlas Mountain region where they come into their own in the kitchen, for example, in the many recipes for chicken or lamb *tajine*, each a slight variation on the next.

The important thing is to brown your meat of choice with a lot of onion, add the usual spices (certainly ginger and cinnamon, but in his book *Ziryab: Authentic Arab Cuisine*, Farouk Mardam-Bey, good Syrian that he is, also suggests including rosebuds), then add water or broth and cook for at least an hour. Meanwhile, in another pan, soften the dried apricots with water and honey, and add them to the meat when it is nearly cooked. This creates the sweet-and-sour taste that distinguishes this simple yet original dish. The colour of the sun. **E**



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