

A Boy Without a Leg, an Occupier Without a Heart

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We left the house in the Deheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem last week with a malaise I cannot remember feeling for a long time: [sadness over a boy's fate](#), frustration at my helplessness, and rage at those who had caused him the suffering.

Issa al-Mouati – a 14-year-old boy whose right leg was amputated after he was shot by Israeli soldiers in September 2015 – is being held in an Israeli prison. Back in the home of his sick grandmother in the overcrowded refugee camp, his mother Rada told me, with remarkable acceptance, what happened to her son since the soldiers left him permanently crippled.

She spoke of the two and a half months he had been confined to hospital, one of which he spent as a detainee with his hands bound to the bed. She did not move from his side, leaving her newborn baby and sick mother behind.

She told us of the three operations when they amputated his leg, in stages. Of his month-long trip to the United States, alone, at the age of 13, for the prosthetic leg fittings. And of his arrest in the dead of night about 10 days ago.

The Israel Defense Forces stormed the camp in one of its unnecessary, abominable round-up operations, intended mainly as a show of strength, to abuse the residents and as a military exercise. The camp's youth tried to resist the invader with their primitive weapons – rocks and firebombs. The soldiers hunted down whoever they could catch and Issa, with his prosthetic leg, was part of their haul.

The IDF spokesman would later claim the soldiers didn't know he was disabled. The police spokesman would say that an indictment was being prepared against him. Rada would tell of the beatings her son received during the interrogation and the kick to his prosthesis, which dislodged it. The police spokesman would deny it.

Rada would recount that she was instructed to produce medical documents to prove Issa's leg had been amputated, in order to release him. And the police spokesman would talk about "a medical condition": "He was asked to submit medical documents that would allow for treatment during his detention."

The military prosecutor would object to his release, the military court would authorize his custody and everything would proceed in keeping with the law. A few days afterward, Issa would suddenly be released without bail.

He spent last weekend at home, with his parents, brothers, sisters and sick grandmother. He has two trials hanging

over him: one for throwing stones in the incident that led to his 2015 injury; the other for throwing stones in the incident that led to his arrest. Meanwhile, Issa has been moved down a year, to sixth grade, due his prolonged absence from school.

Everything was done according to the law. The raid on the camp in the middle of the night was legal. Firing live bullets at a child was legal. His arrest and custody were also legal, as was his interrogation. Did his interrogators make sure they stuck to the law on arresting and interrogating minors? That's highly doubtful, but who's keeping count? A "terrorist" is a "terrorist," even if he's a child with an amputated leg. The only thing that is blatantly illegal is throwing stones at an occupier, an invader, an abuser and an evictor.

Israel's defensive shield of obtuseness, with all the automatic blind justifications for the occupier's wrongs, could perhaps be cracked only through role reversal. What would have happened if Palestinians had shot a Jewish child? What would have happened if they had arrested a crippled Jewish child? And what would have happened if they had abused a Jewish child whose leg had been amputated? It's not hard to imagine the outcry that would have arisen from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth – "Jewish blood" – the demand to condemn; Danny Danon in the UN General Assembly; the child's parents in the VIP gallery, waving for all to see a photograph of the stump.

But Issa is Palestinian, and his parents are poor and busy with the grandmother's illness and making a living more than anything else. And what happens when an ultra-Orthodox boy or young settler throws stones at soldiers? And perhaps Issa didn't throw stones – it may yet emerge that he fired at the soldiers with a cannon or a tank. Wait, just wait, for his trial.

Everything's OK, occupier, your conscience is white as snow. It was necessary to shoot Issa; it was necessary to bind the wounded Issa; it was necessary to imprison the crippled Issa. For what choice does Israel have when the Palestinians, in their dastardliness, force it to shoot and imprison young amputees?

