

“Gaza is a prison with destruction all around it”

Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk: **Portrait of a young Palestinian artist targeted for death by the IDF**

Joanne Laurier
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Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk is an extraordinary documentary directed by Sepideh Farsi, an Iranian filmmaker living in exile in Paris. In early 2024, Farsi traveled to the Egyptian-Palestinian border to document the Israeli genocide in Gaza, but was prevented from entering the enclave.

In April 2024, Farsi found herself in Cairo, where she filmed Palestinian refugees in the Egyptian capital. She met a man who had just gotten out of Gaza. He told the filmmaker about Fatima Hassouna, a “young, brilliant and talented photographer.”

The film begins when Farsi first contacts the 24-year-old photojournalist in the north of the territory, and enlists her in documenting life under murderous Israeli siege. After just two conversations, the idea arises of making a film through interviews with Fatima as she describes her life and those of the people trapped in the bombarded coastal strip. The rich and lively conversation between the two women lasts for nearly a year. “Both of our lives are conditioned by war,” says the director, who faces arrest if she returns to Iran.

On April 15, 2025, Farsi shares publicly the news of her documentary film’s selection by the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, and Fatima expresses her desire to attend the world premiere of *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*. Farsi ends the cellphone call requesting Hassouna’s passport. On the following morning, April 16, Fatima Hassouna and nine relatives are killed in their sleep in a targeted Israeli airstrike. This is how the fascist Netanyahu regime responds to the exposure of its crimes.

An open letter, published in the run-up to the Cannes festival opening ceremony, condemning Hassouna’s killing and denouncing the industry’s “passivity” and “silence” regarding the events in Gaza, was signed by more than 350 actors, directors and producers—among them Richard Gere, Susan Sarandon, Joaquin Phoenix, Guillermo del Toro, Guy Pearce, Ralph Fiennes, David Cronenberg, Viggo Mortensen and Javier Bardem. Juliette Binoche, the jury president of the film festival,

honored Hassouna at the opening of the festival with the words: “She should have been here among us this evening [...] Art remains. It is a powerful testimony of our lives and dreams; and we, the audience, embrace it.”

In the documentary, Fatima describes the unbearably harsh living conditions as well as the mass killings of her relatives. The photojournalist is constantly interrupted by poor internet connection. The video calls are intertwined with Fatima’s photography, mainly focused on the incredible suffering of the Gaza population.

The film’s title comes from an expression Fatima uses to describe working as a photographer in Gaza: “It’s like putting your soul on your hand and walking,” meaning that every time she goes out, she carries her life openly, exposed to death at any second. This phrase captures the film’s core theme of the will to survive in the middle of catastrophe.

The documentary relies on cellphone video, problematic audio recordings and still photographs, giving it a rough, immediate feel rather than that of polished reporting. The tone is emotionally intense and serious but not despairing. Fatima often jokes, smiles and insists on hope. The film often operates in the tension between her optimism and the awareness she may not survive.

Fatima lives with her family in a small apartment in one of the most devastated areas of northern Gaza, surrounded by ruins and rubble.

Bombed-out buildings, collapsed streets and frequent airstrikes make the area physically dangerous, so simply going outside to take photos means risking death ...

Access to basic necessities such as food, water and electricity is highly unreliable; over time, shortages worsen and Fatima describes scavenging and “eating like animals” to get by...

She remains outwardly optimistic and often smiles, but gradually shows exhaustion and depression as more friends and relatives are killed and the siege tightens ...

Fatima speaks of having “many different options to die” in

Gaza, revealing a life lived under continuous fear, yet she insists on staying on her land and refusing forced displacement.

Her neighborhood is repeatedly bombed, and she documents the destruction, making violence a normal part of her surroundings. Staying indoors is not the ultimate security, as she and her family were assassinated in an airstrike as they slept.

Bodies, body parts and blood are part of the everyday landscape. At one point the head of her aunt is found.

Drones, explosions and collapsing houses are routine, so every outing with her camera means risking being killed like many of her colleagues.

Fatima experiences repeated bereavement, describing her life as surrounded by death, black and red colors, and the smell of corpses, and becoming visibly overjoyed when she manages to get small treats like potato crisps.

Many days are spent in overcrowded, makeshift shelters or tents with no privacy, safety or warmth, where families live in cramped conditions and tents collapse in wretched weather.

Familiar places like stadiums and streets are turned into displacement camps and “cities of ghosts,” adding to the psychological burden of seeing her home transformed into ruins.

She roams the streets without a fixed plan, photographing destruction and survivors despite the same dangers that ultimately killed her in an airstrike in her family home.

Gaza journalists like Fatima face extreme, often fatal risks under blockade and during assaults, including murder, injury, harassment and starvation while trying to report. Gaza has been one of the deadliest places in the world for journalists, with reporters and camera crews killed or injured in murderous Israeli airstrikes, shelling and shootings while working or at home. The film’s press kit reports that “Since October 7th, 2023, at least 211 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza by the Israeli army.”

Media workers report being hit in clearly marked “Press” gear, and newsrooms, cars and press equipment are destroyed or damaged in attacks. Phone calls from the IDF obviously warn them to stop reporting, as well there is harassment, detention and ill-treatment during raids and military operations.

Reporters in northern Gaza work under siege conditions, with little food, clean water or medicine, sometimes going out to film while themselves hungry, weak and sleep-deprived, as is the case with Fatima.

The blockade and repeated assaults destroy infrastructure, making safe shelter scarce and forcing journalists to move between damaged homes, hospitals and makeshift camps.

With foreign correspondents largely barred from entering Gaza, local journalists bear almost the entire burden of reporting, often without protective gear, backup teams or safe exit routes.

Access to information is systematically restricted: press freedom groups document blocked access to sites, broken

equipment, confiscated devices and orders to leave under threat of arrest.

Beyond physical attacks, there was a wider “war on narrative,” as restrictions and intimidation seek to silence or discredit local reporting from inside the strip.

“Stealing our money, our tradition. They are stealing everything,” acknowledges Fatima.

“I have no focus. I can’t stand up. I can’t talk. We don’t have healthy food.”

One of the means she expresses herself is through poetry. She reads a poem in Arabic on Farsi’s little cellphone screen:

“The man who wore his eyes”

Maybe I’m ushering in my death

now

Before the person standing in front of me loads

His elite sniper rifle

And it ends

And I end.

Silence.

“Are you a fish?”

I did not answer when the sea asked me

I didn’t know where these crows came from

And pounced on my flesh

Would it have seemed logical?

-If I said: Yes-

Let these crows pounce

at the end

On a fish!

She crossed

And I did not cross

My death crossed me

And a sharp sniper bullet

I became an angel

For a city.

Huge

Bigger than my dreams

Bigger than this city



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