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*Because They Hate: A Memoir of Tumultuous Times*

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**Abstract**

Can a whole population be good or evil? Does it not belie the common human experience if a society is painted solely in one shade. There are all kinds of people within a community- good, bad and grey. This is not to say that there are no mass madnnesses- public hysterias like religious jingoism that run across all sections of a given population and that affect even the good ones with the fervour equal in intensity with which it instigates the evil ones. Gabriel was trapped in a situation where a particular religious population was on ascendancy and the religion she belonged to, the religion that represented Lebanon for centuries and was the soul of its national identity, was turning into a national minority at a scary pace owing primarily to the immigration policy of the government.

The psychological impact of being in the war zone is immense not just for the combatants, for they have to go through the hellish thrill of life and death experience every moment and also a large proportion of them end up suffering from traumas like PTSD and a range of such ailments even after the withdrawal from the war, but also for the civilian population which is the hardest hit and is unintentionally involved in such quagmires.

The current paper is a deliberate effort to keep ideological aspects out of the human narrative. The very problem with theorizing every aspect of human experience is that it belittles and becomes dismissive of a wide range of possible explanations as against the dominant narrative paddled out. What Bridget Gabriel has written is her experience through the conundrum of societal upheavals in Lebanon. She has her voice and her perspective drenched in a specific ideological framework. There is another counter framework that can be deployed against hers, but then that would also be a game- play of narratives.

**Keywords:** memoir, narrative, conflict, bigotry, ethics, perspective

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*Because They Hate* is a memoir by Brigitte Gabriel, a woman who has emerged from one of the most troubled parts of the world. It is her reflection on the events of a lifetime, though a single human lifespan is too short to accurately assess and summarise the conflicts that have run through generations and have changed so many hues. Still, the book was a necessary step for Gabriel, it seems like a cathartic work which was essential as it brought a new dimension to light. Significantly, it should be noted that the book is not an autobiography as its content corroborates to the definition as laid down in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. It is to be distinguished from the **memoir**, in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private **diary** or **journal**, which is a day-to-day record of the events in one's life, written for personal use and satisfaction, with little or no thought of publication. (Abrams 22)

The book has not only received great commercial success, it is also acknowledged as an important work to understand the dynamics and psychology of the belligerent groups in the mid-east and therefore, "*Because They Hate* was put on the reading list at the FBI Academy and was assigned as mandatory reading for Navy SEALs heading to the Middle East" (Gabriel XX).

The memoir describes her childhood years with old the parents in the most inhospitable circumstances turning from heavenly small-town life to the very center of militancy - the hotbed of warring factions surreptitiously involved with the foreign armed forces leading to great misery and frustration for the minority that Gabriel belonged to.

The demographic shift in Lebanon from a Christian majority country to a Muslim majority country in a short span of time is mind boggling as the writer states: "When Lebanon gained its independence from France in 1941, its population was approximately 55 percent Christian and 45 percent Muslim" (Gabriel 11). Obviously, there are multiple reasons involved for such a shift but the impact on the common masses, especially the ones who have been a witness to the changing social landscape, is beyond measure. For the future generations the shift becomes the new normal but for the generation or generations during which such tectonic shift occurs, life loses its significance. Such hybrid generations search meaning of life in symbols and icons which become obsolete or at least utterly powerless. Gabriel belongs to one such generation and the trauma of being in the midst of a civilizational destruction cannot be gauged or described in simple human language. She and her people became helpless witness to the rising power of foreign militia; in no time the marauding armies of foreign bandits overthrew town after town resulting in the relegation of Christians as defenceless scapegoats:

A lot of Muslims poured in from other Muslim countries, such as Iran, the founder and supporter of Hezbollah, one of the leading terrorist organizations in the world today. They also came from Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Iraq, and Egypt. The Lebanese civil war was not between the Lebanese; it was a holy war declared on the Christians by the Muslims of the Middle east. (Gabriel 35)

Such phenomena are not restricted to any one religion or region or even an era as would be evident from the following excerpt from *The Darkening Age* which describes the turning of the Abrahamic fortunes in ancient Rome:

But that was not how Christianity was sold in the fourth century. The church was not marketed as a way to improve a tax bill, or as a balm for anxiety. Christianity was not offered to the Roman Empire as ecclesiastical comfort blanket against the ills of the world. This was not a lifestyle choice. This was not even about life and death. It was far more important than that.

This was a war. The struggle to convert the empire was nothing less than a battle between good and evil, between the forces of darkness and those of light. It was a battle between God and Satan himself. (Nixey 9)

But life is not static and good things do happen amidst the darkest hours; this is what Gabriel learnt when she encountered a young man in her locality and became really enamoured with him:

Chuck and I had become very close. I was seventeen years old and he was twenty-two. We cared about each other a great deal. It wasn't love with goose bumps, but the kind of feelings that made me think about him all the time and worry about his safety. (Gabriel 63)

What she felt was the first bloom of spring, the moments when nature explores its potential in the individual buds and she was not sure like all the new sprouts when they look wondrously at the immense life and space around them, hesitantly, unsure of what it is all about. And she was lonely, very lonely, in a town secluded from the world, like all such small towns which are a world unto themselves. With little female companionship and a genteel soul, the all too sensitive girl came face to face with what could be the love of her life. But this was the fairy part of the tale. There was another aspect to the things; there was an undeclared war going on and it was tarnishing not just the social fabric but was wreaking havoc on the younger generation of impressionable youths. The youthful aspirations of this young girl were decimated by the harsh reality of war and destruction:

As they slid the plastic bag into the box, I saw Chuck's name written on its side. And as they pulled the bag over, a human finger fell from it. Without thinking, I bent down, picked it up, and put it in the box with the rest of him.

And then I began to scream so loudly that it hurt my throat. I was hysterical. (Gabriel 67)

Her immediate response to this tragedy, probably the first intense one that she felt in her life, was immense and yet she moved on (or did she really?) because there was nothing in her surroundings that would give her the pleasure of mourning what has been lost. She had to girdle all her resources to face the imminent future. She had to look after not just her own well-being but also that of her ailing parents.

Such untold emotional destruction is a commonplace experience in such conflict zones where sisters lose their brothers, parents lose their children and yet there's no one to talk to, no one to bank upon for emotional support or any other assistance. Such is the tenor of life in disturbed societies around the globe and it is all a making of human folies- madness for wealth and power and glory, sometimes brazenly naked and sometimes garbed in the name of religion and almighty God. Such has been the history of humanity and people still suffer in the name of God. The biggest irony being, religion which is supposed to provide amelioration at the moment of deep turmoil, becomes a tool in the hands of bigots to inflict unsurmountable misery and pain on common masses with no one to prevent such inhumanity and savagery all done in the name of God- their God whom they believe is the only God. Such is the history of religions.

And there is no prize in guessing as to who suffers the most. It is invariably the weaker sections of the society, people who have nothing to do with such conflicts, common masses who simply want to live their lives peacefully with their little dreams and little conflicts, little pleasures and little pains. It is the young girls and women young boys and old parents who have to bear the brunt of inhumanity. They are the prime targets of extremists. Women specially turn into the coveted bounty in such circumstances.

One poignant description in the narrative runs thus: "Knowing that there would be nobody to prepare me for burial, I asked my mother if I could put on my pretty Easter dress. They might rob me of my life, but they would not rob me of how I wanted to look before I was gone forever" (Gabriel 56).

The helplessness of the young girl, her exposure to the inescapable truths of life around her, the fickleness of life and sense of incapacity however fail to compound into some formidable force of destruction that could force her into subservience. She knows and respects her dignity as an individual and as a member of her community, howsoever persecuted in its own homeland, and it gives her strength to fightback in the face of hostile circumstances. She becomes a symbol of what an individual should be and how one can live with decency and how one should die with their head held high.

A human 'belongs', she has an identity and her roots; she is not just a breathing thing. She has every right to uphold her individuality and her identity, whatever the circumstances are. When individuals in such communities stand up for themselves and for their groups, the enemy cannot overcome such resistance because every individual, even the old becomes the representative of their community, as is evident from Bridget's father's remark: "'Brigitte, you are young. We have lived a long life. We are old and are going to die soon anyway. We can't run if they come to kill us. But we will create a distraction while you run toward Isreal and never look back'" (Gabriel 57). The sense of sacrifice in parents can move even stone hurts to tears. It is not a fictional scene it is something that happened to Gabriel it is something that she remembered when she was writing her memoir and it is something that she will remember until her deathbed. The parent child relationship that she shared seems like the biggest place bliss of her life. Even a cursory look at the syntax of sentences when she describes her parents, her interactions with her mother and her father, is an ample testimony to her deep devotion and reverence for those two noble souls.

As the fate had destined, one fine day the family got trapped in the middle of an unprovoked shelling and Gabriel was forced to accompany her wounded mother to Israel for medical assistance and the way the nurses handled the patient and the teenage girl made her emotional beyond bounds: "I broke out crying again, but this time not from fear and uncertainty, but because of the compassion and love being bestowed upon me. For the first time in my life, I experienced a human quality that I knew my culture would not have shown to its enemy" (Gabriel 78).

Sometimes it is really difficult to locate the source of one's emotions especially when one is overwhelmed with a complex set of sensitivities. A person who has witnessed a certain set of social values which are counterintuitive to human sensibility is bounced to reply in a certain awkward manner when she comes face to face with a very different set of socio- cultural environment and people who are very different in their mental makeup from the ones she has always encountered and despised in her heart of hearts. It can also be analysed as a situation where Gabriel for the first time came in contact with something alien- an experience which not everyone from a conflict zone has an opportunity to experience.

As a matter of fact, if people from conflict zones who come from divided homes and destroyed social structures do get a chance to interact with the world outside, there is every possibility for them to develop an altogether different outlook- an outlook which is Catholic, far more humane and not fragmented by meanness, cowardice and self-defeatism. Basically, it is just a matter of outgrowing one's cocoon and realizing the true nature of humanity which is far more than a blind following of a certain religion. But this is something the Lebanese militants were not acquainted with and for the author, "Being a Lebanese Christian working for an Israeli- backed TV station was extremely dangerous in that part of the world, where Muslims looked upon killing both Christians and Jews as a sacred duty. To them I was not only a Christian but a traitor" (Gabriel 104).

The irony is that if you stand up for yourself and fight against the oppression, destruction and subjugation of your homeland, you become a traitor simply because you were too naive to allow people to settle on your land- people who did not belong to the soul, who did not belong to the soil, and who did not belong to the myths and mores of your motherland; and over time when they took over the system you're left with nothing but regret and a complete sense of despondency. This is indeed a

travesty of civilizational collapse which is also evident in places like Kashmir where slowly and steadily the local culture and religions were replaced and a time came when an overwhelming majority turned into a minuscule minority- a minority that was bound to face persecution and destruction; the minority that was forced to migrate from their homes and hearths. Gabriel was facing a situation where her very existence and her voice became the cause of threat to the extremists or rather one should say a perceived threat- something that bigots cannot withstand. They cannot withstand counter narratives; they cannot withstand people talking and discussing ideas; they cannot withstand views that run counter to their ideology. And they respond in similar fashion around the globe- they respond with death threats and attempts to murder.

Gabriel is a voice that was bound to emanate from Lebanon, she is a voice of a culture that was respectful of others, adjusting and accommodating and these very qualities became the cause of its painful destruction- a phenomenon which is by no means unique and quite absurdly has been repeated over centuries, howsoever unrealistic or morally disturbing it may seem. Civilizations that have respected and accommodated others have ended up being destroyed by aggressive hordes of uncivilized barbarians and this is something which is evident from examples replete in history books, something which is beyond the scope of the current research but nonetheless a truth that cannot be negated.

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