

Surrounded by the ruins of war, looking for a smile

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Marco Rodari has returned to Iraq, as is now his habit: summer in the Gaza Strip, and Christmas in Baghdad. He cannot help himself; he knows the children are waiting for him. The way he is welcomed always moves him: the smiles, the laughter, the shouting and applause give him the energy to be a clown.

Once again, **Marco Rodari has started off the year in the Iraqi capital**, surrounded by its everyday life, by a normality that consists of fear and tension.

“My day in Baghdad begins right away in the early morning, around 6 o’ clock, because the heavy traffic in the city forces you to move fast to get to the various schools where I try to make the children smile. **It’s very difficult to get around in Baghdad**, because of the traffic, but also because of the continual checks by the soldiers and the police, who try, often in vain, to stop the attacks, which, sadly, started again with the New Year. After my tour of the schools and after visiting some families, I come home, and from the late afternoon onwards, as evening approaches, I have to stay at home, usually in the dark.”

The uncertain life of a country struggling to find the way to peace requires great sacrifices. “The landline doesn’t work and public transport practically doesn’t exist; you can only get around by car, or at least, by minibus. There’s no lack of food, but it’s poor quality. Everything here is poor quality. **Even electricity almost seems a luxury.** The different types of war that have taken place here in Baghdad since 2003 have prevented, for example, any kind of maintenance, any investments, and so, everything

wears out, or simply breaks with time.”

“But, as always, **we keep going thanks to the children’s smiles, which are always there.** The magical moment with them is fantastic, because it’s then that everybody, the children, the teachers, the policemen, the soldiers and me, forget about the situation we’re living in, and **Baghdad becomes a normal city.**”

It is like living suspended lives, with a sense of precariousness, despite the certainty that you and your moment of entertainment are needed. “In these days, the onslaught in and against Mosul has started again, and here in Baghdad, we’re hoping for a return to peace, or at least for a ‘smaller’ war. But I must add that, the sense of uncertainty increases as the years go by. Soon, I’ll be going to the North of Iraq; I must say, I have a lot of work. Sadly, it’s because I’m usually asked to come to difficult situations, and there are more of them every year. Iraq is an example, once the problems were mainly in Baghdad, now the whole of Iraq is involved.

However, we all keep going on, thanks to the children’s smiles, which are always there.”

The Clown is setting off again, looking for smiles and serenity. With the hope that tomorrow will be better.

di Alessandra Toni Translated by Alabi & Zanzi (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)