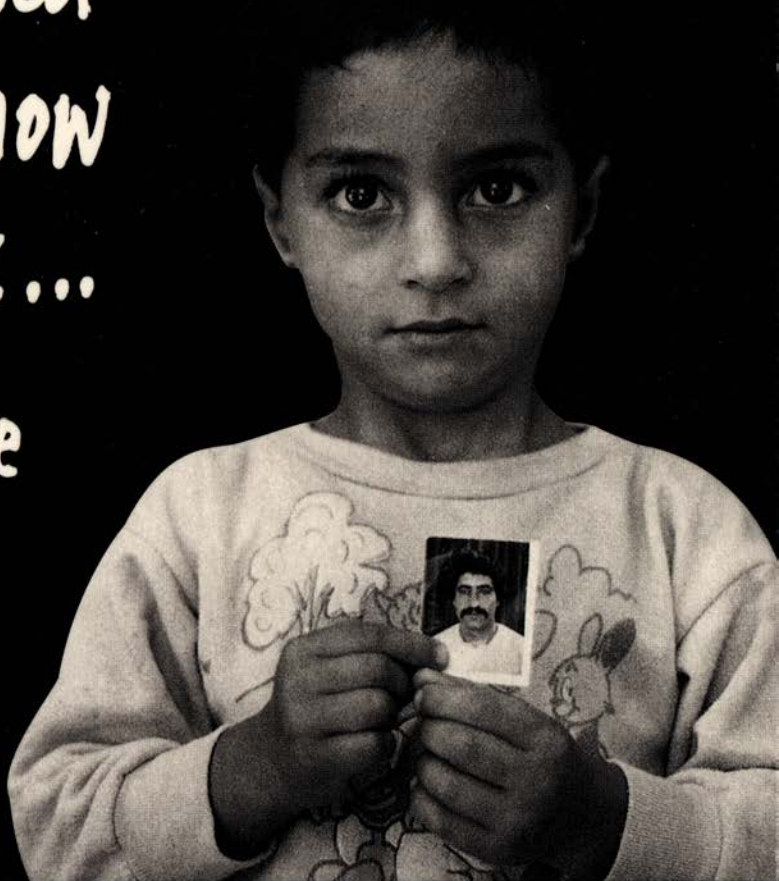


# PALESTINIANS SPEAK

I Painted  
the Snow  
Black ...

because  
we're  
afraid  
of the  
days



Edited by ALIJAH GORDON

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... BECAUSE WE'RE AFRAID  
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Edited by

ALIJAH GORDON

based on testimonies taken by  
NOOR KHAIRIYATI MOHD. ALI



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## In Memoriam

- Woman (1): Oh caravan leader, send my regards to my mother. Tell her what happened and describe to her my grief. Oh my children, oh my beloved ones, where did you go and leave me? Where did you go leaving the young children behind? To whom did you entrust them? Oh my beloved ones, with whom shall I stay? With whom shall I talk? May God be pleased with you. May He have mercy on you. Did they cover you with soil, oh my children? May God make the earth soft on you.
- Woman (2): Oh God, do you or do you not see us? Do you or do you not hear us?
- Woman (3): Oh people, tell the world about what happened to the Palestinian people. Describe what happened to us. Oh boat waiting in the port, on your return tell our beloved ones. The days and the years glided away with the departure of my loved ones. It is a departure without return from exile, oh Palestinians! Oh mother, my tears flow down my cheeks. Oh mother, where shall I go? I am already homeless in the land of the Arabs. I have been alone all night counting the stars by myself. I went to the sea, oh mother, to cast my net. And in the sea I found that the net was lost.

Sabra and Shatila  
1982–1987

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Translated and edited from recordings of mourning women made by ABC News in the wake of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, September 1982.



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It might be of particular interest that Malaysians sponsor some of the children of those whose testimonies appear in the book: Dr. Kamal Ariffin Shah sponsors Mohamed, the son of Abu Mohamed Aina; Puan Asmah Isham sponsors Nourhan and Mariam, two brilliant daughters of Hiyam Mohammad Ten Azzouka; and Datuk Hajah Dayang Mahani Tun Pg. Hj. Ahmad Raffae sponsors their charming younger brother, Mohammad.

The testimonies were translated into English by Mohd. Nazri b. Asi Abu to whom we're deeply indebted. These oral histories were then restructured and edited by Alijah Gordon and the manuscripts given to our brother Samir Abu Teen, a Lecturer in the Lebanese American University at Saida, Lebanon, who advised on what would be the appropriate sequence and made additional corrections. The manuscripts had been typed by Mr. Philip Zachariah and Che Harliza Khairuddin, and Kay Lyons graciously checked through. Our brother Shakib Gunn designed the cover.

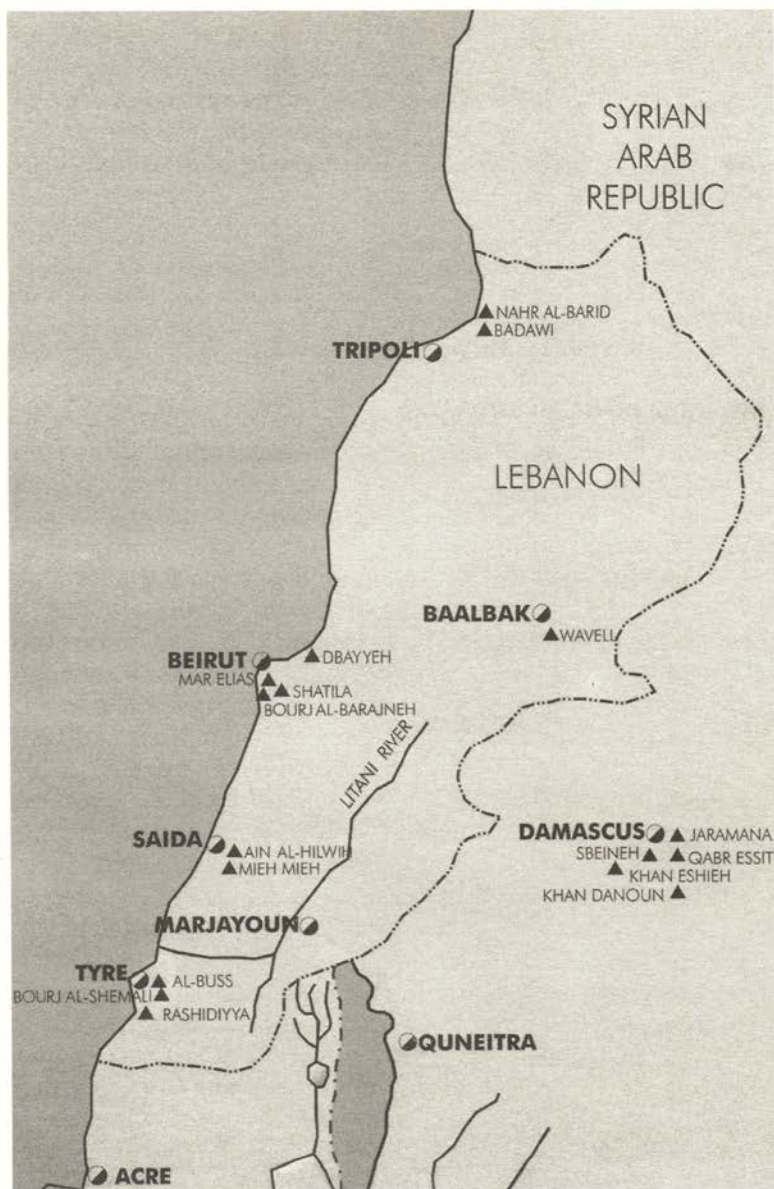
The heads for the various sections; Lebanon: A Historic Overview; Facts: Palestinians in Lebanon; Chronology of Main Historical Events, as well as the Glossary of Political Groups, were prepared by the Editor, Alijah Gordon.

Mohammed and Fazila Hassim of South Africa gave US\$ 1,000.00 to cover Noor Khairiyati's costs in Lebanon. Abang Mohamad Shibli bin Abang Mohamad Nailie, Company Secretary of Selah Timber, Sarawak, generously donated, from which Noor Khairiyati's air ticket was paid as well as some basic costs of the work. Generous contributions have also been received from Dato' Anuar Othman; Haji Mahamad Fathil bin Dato Mahmood; Datin Soraya Kamil; Mohd. Qari Ahmad; Kamarudin Md. Nor; Puan Mahmuda Atta Mohamed; Datin Ropeah Hassan; Datin Jeanne Maznah Merican, and others who gave *fi sabil* Allah and don't wish to be mentioned. May God reward them all.

Through the goodness of the donors, these testimonies of survivors of wanton cruelty — mostly incredibly brave, resilient women — will be donated to 1,650 Malaysian secondary schools and tertiary institutions, and we pray will reawaken the Malaysian public to the reality of 400,000 Palestinians who remain in Lebanon as stateless refugees from their homeland of Palestine.

ALIJAH GORDON

# MAP OF LEBANON



- ▲ OFFICIAL PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP
- TOWN/CITY
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY



## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: MSRI AND THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS

**I**N February 1987 the Palestinians under bombardment in the Palestinian camps of Lebanon asked for a *Fatwa* — religiously binding opinion — granting them permission to eat human flesh. In one of the testimonies you will read where a survivor speaks of the camp of Bourj al-Barajneh having reached this point of desperation and of his disgust. “We have no alternative as there are no cats or dogs left”.<sup>1</sup>

The appeal was made to the Lebanese Sunni religious leader Mufti Hassan Khaled and other religious authorities. “After food supplies ... dogs and cats, have run down, we call on you to issue an edict allowing us to eat the flesh of humans, specially those who cannot go on because of hard conditions on all sides.” Asked what he meant by “those who cannot go on”, the official said: “the severely wounded, the handicapped, the old people who cannot defend the camp”. He said there was starvation in Bourj al-Barajneh.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding this call of desperation, the camp people found unacceptable the eating of the flesh of their relatives, of their neighbours, of one another.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> February, *The New Straits Times (NST)*, based on a Beirut report, quoted Shaykh Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah as saying that he considered the appeal was meant to arouse humanitarian reactions “but that does not diminish the drama of the Palestinians subjected to a food blockade”. Shaykh Fadlallah is the leader of Hizbullah which in November 1986 had denounced Amal’s food blockade of the camps. At that stage, Bourj al-Barajneh had already been under siege for 72 days.

MSRI responded to this dire situation on 9 February by sending a cable to Nabih Berri, head of the Amal organization, which was besieging the camps: “Whatever the political rights or wrongs of the matter, it is *haram* that 20,000 Muslims in Bourj al-Barajneh should have to ask for *Fatwa* permission to eat human

---

1. Press report from Beirut, *NST*, 8 February 1987.

2. Press report from Beirut, *Sunday Star*, 8 February 1987.

flesh. In the name of Allah, allow Red Crescent to take them safely out of the camps." Simultaneously, we sent the same message to Hafez al-Assad, President of the Syrian 'Arab Republic, alleged to have been actively supporting the Amal siege.

"On 17 February Amal leader Nabih Berri announced from Damascus, Syria, the lifting of the 'food siege' around Bourj al-Barajneh. Transmitted by Damascus radio, the announcement clearly had Syrian backing, and began to be put into effect on 20 February. This date marked a new stage in the siege, with women allowed to leave and re-enter the camp, but at the mercy of harassment and sniping."<sup>3</sup>

Not that long afterwards came Ramadan — the Muslim fasting month — and then the joyous *'Id al-Fitr* (Hari Raya). On that day I sat in the home of a Malay journalist with Bernama, the Malaysian National News Agency. But I could not share the day. The more I saw Malaysians cheerfully eating and laughing, oblivious to what was happening in the camps, the more soul-sick I became. I told my host I had to leave, which disturbed him and he insisted on knowing why. When I shared with him my revulsion, he asked what I wanted to do about it, and I said I had the feeling to go to the press and beg support from the Malaysian people for the besieged Palestinians in the camps. Zulkafly Baharuddin's response was that on the next day he would organize a Press Conference so that I could do precisely that. From the time of the television coverage, our 'phones never stopped ringing. I manned one 'phone downstairs, and my adopted daughter manned the other upstairs. Malaysians poured in empathy and financial support to send medical volunteers and medicines to the camps.

Then K.H. Lim of *New Straits Times* 'phoned and asked precisely how much money we would need to send the first team to Beirut. I hadn't really thought about it. Simplistically, I had only thought to raise the cost of air tickets and some minimal stipends for the volunteers. It was Kamarudin Md. Nor (of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth) who advised that we would need war-zone insurance for the volunteers. K.H. Lim made a com-

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3. See 73 *infra*.

mitment that by 5.00 o'clock each day either I would ring him to report the names of those who had donated and the amounts received, or he would 'phone to me to get the precise information, which he would then feed into the *NST* computer and those names and amounts would be published daily. Thus the public would be assured that there could be no misuse of their donations.

From Beirut, Dr. Ang Swee Chai, originally from Penang and one of the founders of Medical Aid for Palestinians at London, had written to her husband back in London saying that their medical team was desperately short-handed, and she appealed for volunteers and medicines. Initially, we launched our appeal from Malaysia in support of her work.

At least forty Malaysians with medical experience volunteered. By the beginning of July we were able to put our first team on the plane: four Malaysians: Staff Nurse Dolly Fong; Hospital Assistant Tengku Mustapha Tengku Mansur; Nurse Hajah Rosnah Nayan; and Staff Nurse Mathina Bee Ghulam Mydin. At that time, journalists were not allowed into the camps; so we sent Zulkafly Baharuddin in as an 'ambulance driver' that he might feed back information to the Malaysian people. The second team, dubbed the 'Magnificent Seven', left for Beirut on 30th August, including Staff Nurse Pok Looi; Acupuncturist Hor Fah Thye; Budik Busu, ex-Army Medical Assistant; Staff Nurse Hamidah Ghazalli; Dentist Dr. Mohd. Yusop Amil; Hospital Assistant D.R. Naidu and ex-Army Medical Assistant Ahmad Bakri.

Before the volunteers left, we had made 'Malaysian Medical Volunteer' T-shirts as part of our fund-raising campaign. All the volunteers had been given those T-shirts. One of the volunteers, despite his military background, had some qualms about the dangers they would face. In jest, I had told him to wear his Malaysian T-shirt and the snipers would not target him! One of our nurses later hilariously reported that in the middle of one of the more dangerous sieges of the hospital, he had rushed out to his quarters to put on his 'Malaysian Medical Volunteer' T-shirt before returning to duty! By the grace of God none of our Malaysian Volunteers were ever harmed.

Not everyone is a hero. Some of our volunteers had the guts to stay when in extreme circumstances the Norwegian Aid Coordinator pressed them to evacuate. Two Malaysian women staff nurses — Dolly Fong and Pok Looi opted to remain in Bourj al-

Barajneh — as did Hamidah Ghazalli in the southern camp of Rashidiyya — while one Malaysian man not only chose to evacuate but sent a letter to me denouncing his two colleagues for 'insubordination' in putting their moral, professional responsibility to the Palestinians above and beyond their bureaucratic 'duty to follow orders'. Staff Nurse Pok Looi remains to this day working in a camp clinic; she is now married to a Palestinian and has a Palestinian son, Jihad. Of those who returned to Malaysia, Dolly Fong joined as staff at MSRI Kuala Lumpur doing some of the nitty-gritty work that kept the project together.

Mr. Hor Fah Thye stands out in my memory. He served in Shatila Camp, working underground, under the rubble, giving acupuncture relief to the injured and stressed. At one point during the siege, in the miserably rainy weather of December, Dolly Fong managed to leave Bourj al-Barajneh to go to Shatila to give a little portable heater to Hor. With her large eyes rolling and eyelashes blinking, she begged the besieging soldiers to let her into the camp to give her 'husband' that heater. They let her through, but Hor refused the heater saying that the others in the camp had no heaters and neither would he!

Nineteen Malaysian Volunteers<sup>4</sup> served over the coming eight years. Eventually, we opened our own free Dental-Medical Clinic in Barr Elias. No one in need was turned away be they Palestinian, Lebanese, Roma, or even a Syrian soldier. The volunteers were Buddhist Chinese; Muslim Malay; Hindu Indian; and later a Christian Chinese. When they left they had not known one another other than in a few shared orientation sessions in Kuala Lumpur. But when I went to visit the volunteers I found them with their arms wrapped around one another, closer than any family. There was no divisive race or religion, only a humanitarian unity.

As a result of the bombardments, thousands of Palestinian children were left fatherless. Dolly Fong sent back letters from Bait Atfal as-Samoud (Home for the Children of the Steadfast) pushing me to organize Malaysian sponsors for some of these children. We opened the sponsorship programme in 1988 which gradually built up until 400 Malaysians were sponsoring children. You will read in the testimonies where widowed mothers

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4. See list attached.

credit BAS' sponsorship for some of their children as the only way they could manage to keep their kids fed and in school.

Twice Malaysians have also paid to bring their sponsored kids for month-long holidays in Malaysia, during which they were guests of the Malaysian government and feted throughout the country. During one of the dinners, we raised funds to build a Malaysian-gifted Learning Centre in Badawi refugee camp, the only Palestinian building of any substance in the camps. Through another dinner, on the second visit, we were able to contribute towards the initial cost of establishing a Family Guidance Centre in Beirut, where disturbed mothers and children are given psychiatric help. Children were also brought here for operations: to remove an Israeli bullet from a brain, for bone-marrow transplant. Malaysian homes were opened to them and their single parents.

We are indebted to the Malaysian Ministry of Finance which in 1988 established the Akaun Amanah Untuk Membantu Program-Program MSRI (Trust Fund in Aid of MSRI's Programmes) whereby donations are tax-deductible. Members of the Trust are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Social Welfare Department under the Ministry of National Unity and Community Development and MSRI (Alijah Gordon and Dato' Fuad Hassan).

The Oslo 'Peace Accord' managed to confuse the Malaysian public into believing that the Palestinian problem was solved, and this sorely cut into the support for our work for the single mothers and fatherless Palestinian children who remain stranded in refugee camps in Lebanon. God willing these testimonies will reawaken their generous concern.

ALIJAH GORDON

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There are Malaysians who think of Alijah Gordon as a Palestinian; others think of her as a Lebanese; they cannot imagine that she is only a human being who shares a unity of pain with the Palestinians. She first became involved in Palestine in 1952 when she studied at Columbia University in the Faculty of Public Law and Government with a concentration on Middle Eastern studies; she was also the chair of the Middle East Society. When a television debate had been scheduled and publicly announced and neither the Syrian Ambassador to the UN — a Palestinian — nor the Lebanese Ambassador agreed to take on Abba Eban, then Israeli Ambassador to the UN (later their Foreign Minister), the 'Arab students pulled her to confront that Oxford University-trained 'Arabist. This widely-covered television debate stigmatized her in an environment which was mostly sympathetic to Israel. And that is where it all began.

No.	Volunteer	Profession	Length of Service
1.	Tengku Mustapha b. Tengku Mansour	Hospital Assistant	(1) As Medical Volunteer: 08 July 1987–30 September 1987 (2) To Assess Sponsorship Programme: 29 January 1988–30 June 1988
2.	Ms Dolly Fong Shook Fung @ 'Aliyah Fong Abdullah, A.B.S.	Staff Nurse	(1) 08 July 1987–07 July 1988 (2) 15 October 1988–15 October 1989 (3) 08 March 1990–07 November 1990 (4) 20 August 1991–31 October 1991
3.	Ms Mathina Bee Gulam Mydin	Staff Nurse	08 July 1987–24 December 1987
4.	Hajah Rosnah bt. Nayan	Nurse	08 July 1987–31 August 1987
5.	Ms Pok Looi	Staff Nurse	(1) 29 August 1987–02 August 1988 (2) 15 October 1988–15 October 1989
6.	Ms Hamidah Ghazalli	Staff Nurse	29 August 1987–07 July 1988
7.	Hor Fah Thye	Acupuncturist	29 August 1987–07 April 1988
8.	D.R. Naidu	Hospital Assistant	29 August 1987–07 January 1988
9.	Budit Busu	(Retd. Army Medical Assistant Class I) Hospital Assistant	29 August 1987–April 1988

No.	Volunteer	Profession	Length of Service
10.	Dr. Mohd. Yusop bin Amil	Dentist	29 August 1987–17 October 1987
11.	Ahmad Bakri bin Abu Bakar	(Retd. Army Medical Assistant Class I) Hospital Assistant	29 August 1987–17 October 1987
12.	Ms Rukshani Kaur	Community Nurse and Midwife	19 November 1988–30 April 1989
13.	Dr. Susheila Kumar Devan	Doctor	05 September 1991–20 March 1992
14.	Ms Ooi Bee Suan	Staff Nurse	05 September 1991–22 February 1992
15.	Dr. Saw Win Maung	Doctor	08 April 1992–30 March 1993
16.	Dr. Shahrina bt. Man Harun	Doctor	23 June 1994–28 July 1994
17.	Ms Noor Khairiyati bt. Mohd. Ali	Assistant Editor	(1) To Assess Sponsorship Programme: 08 March 1990–August 1990 (2) To Record Lives of Palestinian Families: 15 March 1995–15 May 1995
18.	Leow Paik Kin	Health Inspector	15 October 1988 onwards; served 5 terms till 7 November 1994
19.	Patrick Fong Whye Kheong	Administrator MSRI/MAP Clinic	05 December 1994–October 1995



**Top:** Malaysian Staff Nurses Dolly Fong and Pok Looi operating on the floor of the clinic during a siege.

**Bottom:** Malaysian Staff Nurse Hamidah Ghazalli with Palestinian children in Bourj al-Barajneh Camp, Beirut.

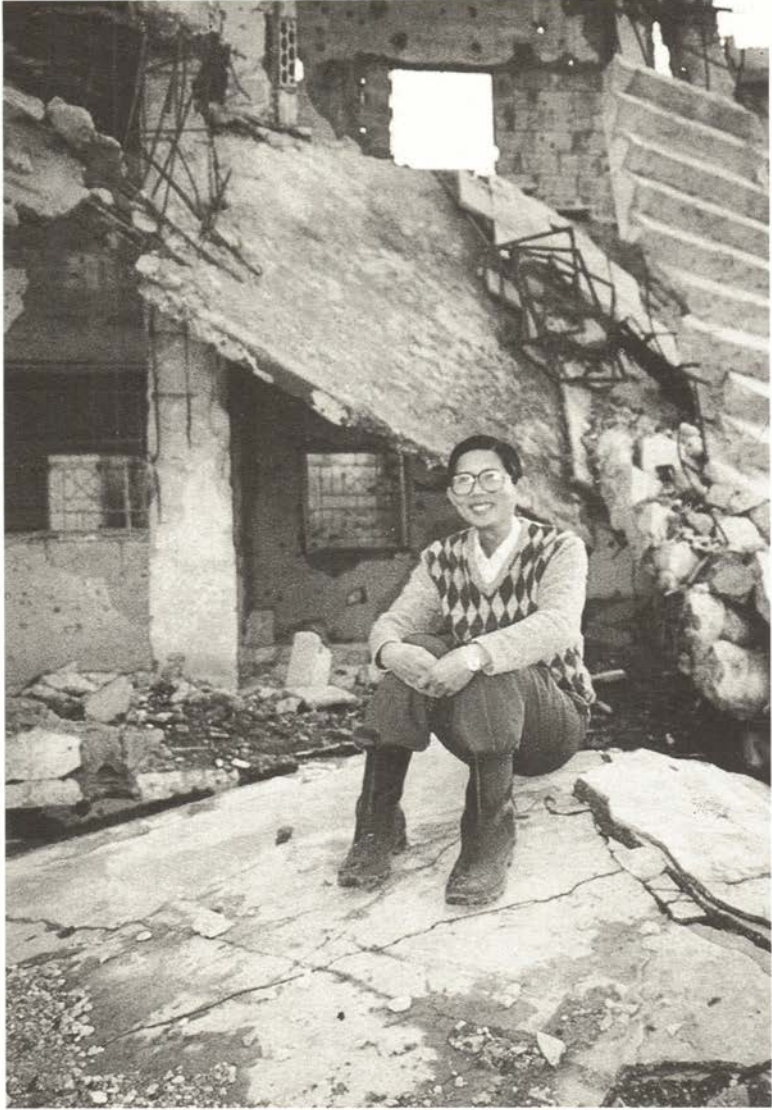


**Top Right:** Staff Nurse Dolly Fong with Fadi of whom she writes in her Vignettes.

**Top Left:** A Palestinian waif in Bourj al-Barajneh Camp.

**Bottom:** Canadian surgeon Dr. Chris Giannou with Palestinian kids. Dr. Chris operated beyond human endurance during multiple sieges of Shatila Camp.





MSRI/ Medical Aid for Palestinians Volunteer Acupuncturist, Mr. Hor Fah Thye helped relieve pain and stress in Shatila Refugee Camp, Beirut, when it was under siege. Ever kind and smiling, he sits amongst the rubble of that sorely bombarded camp.



**Top:** Palestinian kid with amputated arm sharing food in Malaysian clinic at Bourj.  
**Bottom:** Malaysian Staff Nurse Hamidah Ghazalli passing the check-point at Rashidiyya Camp, South Lebanon, where she served.

When evil-doing comes like falling rain, nobody calls  
out 'stop'!  
When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible.  
When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no  
longer heard.  
The cries, too, fall like rain in summer.

Bertolt Brecht  
*Poems in Exile, 1934–36*

## TRUTH IS A WHOLE<sup>1</sup>

**L**EBANON comprises a territory of just over 10,000 square kilometres, extending about 200 kilometres along the eastern Mediterranean coast and bordered from the north and east by Syria, and from the south by Israel. Apart from the coastal cities (including the capital, Beirut) and some narrow stretches of coastal plain, the Lebanese territory consists mostly of mountain and hill country: the Lebanon; the western flanks of the Anti-Lebanon; and the highlands of upper Galilee which are commonly called Jabal Amil. Between the ranges of Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon lies the alluvial valley of the Bekaa (al-Biqa'a) and, in the south, the adjoining valley of Wadi al-Taym. The Lebanese population is composed of different religious communities, some Christian (mainly Maronite, Greek Orthodox, and Greek Catholic), others Islamic (Shi'a Muslim, Sunni Muslim and Druze). Apart from the Armenians of Lebanon, who are relative newcomers to the country, all the Lebanese communities — Christian and Muslim — have historically spoken 'Arabic, and shared at the traditional level in what may be described in common language as an 'Arab way of life.<sup>2</sup>

While the Palestinian testimonies you will read are tales of terror of what has become their daily fare, it is nevertheless true that the Lebanese, themselves, suffered heavily in the years of confrontation 1975–1990. "About 800,000 Lebanese have been caught in this situation which has destroyed the social structure of villages and urban areas, driving part of

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1. Paraphrasing Hegel's: 'The Truth is the Whole'.

2. Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions* (London: I.B. Tauris, repr. 1989) 4.

the population into a permanent state of marginalization, and the other into leaving the country altogether."<sup>3</sup> From predominantly Christian emigration, as the civil war escalated, it became a multi-sectarian emigration. Huda Zreik's survey of Lebanese applying for emigration in 1981–2 stated that 64% of those applying for entry into 'Arab countries were Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Between mid-March and the end of August 1989, 150,000 emigrants came from the predominantly Muslim western area, twice as many as the 75,000 from the predominantly Christian eastern area.<sup>5</sup> Early in 1989, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt indicated that 33–40 per cent of Lebanese Druzes had emigrated from Lebanon since 1975.<sup>6</sup> While some Lebanese fled with only the clothes on their backs, some have opened prosperous businesses in Cyprus and other areas. When the Lebanese pound fell in 1984, staying abroad, although a matter of life and death for many, became increasingly beyond their financial possibilities. Some decided to return to Lebanon but many decided to emigrate permanently.

The 1975–6 war was mainly fought with relatively small-scale weapons: small calibre mortars, some artillery, heavy machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and the like, by young, untrained militiamen. Non-Christian enclaves in predominantly Christian East Beirut were annihilated, and casualties were mainly the result of sniper fire, massacre, or forcible expulsion. But between 1978 and 1981, heavy artillery and rockets were widely used against civilian targets. The war affected areas hitherto preserved from military action not only in urban centres but also in rural areas, and new categories of Lebanese moved out: villagers, small merchants, lower-middle-class employees. In 1978, the Israelis used aircraft to bomb targets in urban areas and against villages during their so-called 'Litani campaign'. In 1982, aircraft were again used against urban centres with massive destruction of whole areas of Beirut, Saida and Tyre during Israel's ironically-termed 'Operation Peace in

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3. Boutros Labaki, "The Lebanese Emigration during the War (1975–1989)", *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, ed. Albert Hourani & Nadim Shehadi (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris & Co., 1992) 606.

4. *Ibid.*, 623.

5. *Ibid.*, 625.

6. *Al-Bayyat* ('Arabic), No.9695, 17–18 June 1989, London, cited in *Ibid.*, 624.

Galilee'. Over half of Lebanon was affected by destruction. Thousands fled abroad. In 1983, there was fighting and destruction between opposing militias, and 1984 and 1985 saw infighting between various Lebanese Army regiments or between militias for control of parts of Beirut. Starting with the February 1989 fighting between some Brigades of the Lebanese Army and militia men of the right-wing Lebanese forces, all types of ordnance were used including long-range heavy artillery, large-calibre mortars, multiple-launch rockets, and tanks. There was hardly a house or apartment in Beirut within a 20 km. radius that had not been hit.<sup>7</sup> Then car bombs started to be placed in urban areas. Civilian casualties were great, as was the destruction of property, and a situation of continuous anxiety was created.

Over 100,000 Lebanese and Palestinians have been killed by the confrontations, a quarter of a million have been wounded, and hundreds of thousands have emigrated. "Hardly any area of Lebanon, from the northernmost tip of the Beka'a (Biq'a'a) valley to the summits of Mount Lebanon, from villages in forgotten valleys to the heart of Beirut, has not been shelled, air raided, blown up, sniped upon, or otherwise damaged. All of this destruction obviously also affected factories, offices, schools, universities, shops, and the like. Psychological traumas suffered by the civilians have been enormous, severely perturbing social relations and family life."<sup>8</sup> "As in all Third World countries, the lower classes suffered first and most. With factories closed, crops destroyed, homes flattened, fixed-income salaried personnel were the first to leave."<sup>9</sup> Many Lebanese left because of the total breakdown of all communications and services. The rationing of electricity was also demoralizing.

"Thousands of Lebanese were displaced by the war, in what was called 'demographic homogenization'. Whole areas would be purged of citizens not belonging to the dominant religious or political affiliation of that particular area. The surviving Shi'is living alongside the Palestinians at Tal al-Za'atar were expelled by the Christian militias to West Beirut in 1976. The Christians of the Chouf area were expelled to East Beirut in 1983 by the Druze

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7. Michael F. Davie, "Cyprus: Haven and Stepping-Stone for Lebanese Migrants and Emigrants", *The Lebanese in the World*, op. cit., 630-1.

8. *Ibid.*, 631.

9. *Ibid.*, 632-3.

militias. Fighting even flares up between elements of the same religion for control of territory. Shi'is against Sunnis or Druze in the Iqlim al Kharroub, Sunnis against 'Alawis in Tripoli, Shi'is against Shi'is in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Christians against Christians in Ashrafiyyah."<sup>10</sup>

Many of the displaced found themselves in areas hostile to their presence. Christian refugees living in what had become completely Christian areas "... found the population aggressive, unwilling to help them, grossly overcharging them for elementary shelter or relief, jealous of any aid given to them, resenting them if they succeeded in creating a new livable environment for themselves. Job opportunities have been denied to them because of their geographic origin."<sup>11</sup> The non-integration of such Lebanese into their new environment has forced many to take the decision to leave permanently.

Areas of Lebanon came under the control of militias with well-determined religion and well-defined political orientations. Anyone not of that affiliation was automatically a potential enemy. A Christian living in a Christian militia-controlled area might not survive if he was affiliated to Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party. Whole villages have been purged of 'undesirable elements'. No one 'won' in Lebanon!

What was the mentality of the right-wing Lebanese Front which in co-ordination with Israel opened the civil war with a massacre of a bus load of Palestinians and Lebanese in April 1975 causing Lebanon to be torn asunder? Its leader Bashir Gemayel in 1977 served notice of its plans: "We have fought the war and we have won," adding that the Lebanese Forces "will not hesitate to take up arms once more. In any case, we have created our own government which is carrying out studies and executing projects."

One of these projects was an ideological guidance programme centred in the Maronite Ruh al-Kuds (Holy Spirit) University in Kaslik village some 20 km. northeast of Beirut, in which Father Boulos Naaman, head of the university's history department and architect of the Lebanese Front's alliance with Israel, had a leading role. Naaman articulated their goal of transforming Lebanon into a Christian homeland. "Muslims

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10. *Ibid.*, 633-4.

11. *Ibid.*, 634.

and Christians cannot live together in Lebanon or anywhere else."<sup>12</sup>

Even before the civil war Kaslik University had become a centre for propagating the conviction that Christian-Muslim co-existence is impossible and for instilling contempt and hatred for Muslims. University brochures presented Muslims as 'the enemy' and employed the terms racists always use in describing human groups held to be inferior: 'the Muslims' sexual life is instinctive lewdness', 'the Muslim God is a god of violence', and the like. Kaslik dismissed any calls for national unity or efforts to unify the country or temper its inequalities as attempts to destroy Lebanon's identity. It repeatedly brandished the 'looming threat' of Lebanon's transformation into an Islamic republic and of the reduction of Christians to 'a small minority'. Kaslik demanded the partition of Lebanon to create a Maronite 'national home' to be linked to Israel. All of this fostered a climate of opinion in which compromise was ruled out.

Demagogic statements by Lebanese Front leader Bashir Gemayel, commander of its military arm, the Lebanese Forces, reflected the views of the Front's extremists that the civil war had been 'a challenge to the very existence of Christian Lebanon ... a war of desecration and eviction against Christians'. He depicted his militias as 'a hedge against the perfidy of the future', and warned that Christians must either 'firm up the war' or 'revert to the co-existence formula' which would mean 'plunging into a sectarian abyss'. The Maronite right-wing had either to re-establish its ascendancy or precipitate another civil war.

The deification of Bashir Gemayel and his father can be seen in the popular reaction in areas under Front control to failed assassination attempts against Bashir in April 1979 and against his father Pierre in June. Portraits of Bashir, wreathed in Biblical

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12. The irony is that the Gemayel family, itself, was a beneficiary of Sunni Muslims favouring Maronite Christians! The coming of the Ottomans to Lebanon in 1516 led to the re-emergence of Turkomen to local importance under a dynasty of chiefs called the Assafs who were Sunni Muslims and who favoured the Maronites. Maronites from the northern region of Mount Lebanon began to settle in Kisrawan. The Gemayel family arrived in 1545 and settled in Bekfaya. The Gemayels only rose to political prominence in the present century in conjunction with the career of Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the Phalange/Kata'ib. See Kamal Salibi, *op.cit.*, 14.

inscriptions, hailed his 'miraculous' escape and foretold the coming of the Messiah: 'Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord'. Pierre Gemayel's even more 'miraculous escape' — when a 50-kiloton remote controlled bomb destroyed the car in which he was riding — brought out his pictures with Biblical verses concerning the resurrection, and his followers thronged to the spot to kiss the ground.<sup>13</sup>

Samir Khalaf vividly describes the result of this right-wing Maronite Christian armed insistence on exclusivity: the complete demoralization of public life. "For over a decade, Lebanon has been victimized by some of the most barbaric and unrelenting forms of senseless violence and indiscriminate terror. Hundreds of thousands have already lost their lives, and many more have been permanently maimed and scarred. Entire towns, villages, and regions have been devastated; communities have perished and cities have been besieged. Property and resources have been ransacked or laid to waste. During periods of intensive fighting, entire communities continue to face the horrors of sudden death and the indignities of uprootedness and dislocation.

"Lebanon, in fact, has been besieged and beleaguered by every possible form of belligerency and collective terror known to human history: from the cruelties of factional and religious bigotry to the massive devastations wrought by militant organizations and state-sponsored armies. They have all generated an endless carnage of innocent victims and an immeasurable toll of human suffering and anguish. The sight of bereaved women wailing over the bodies of their slain kin, panicked refugees fleeing their stricken homes with their scant and disheveled belongings, or disfigured casualties being rescued from the debries and rubble of car bombs and explosions have become much too familiar spectacles of mass terror."

"In a tragic sense, the Lebanese have been homogenized by fear, terror, and grief. No one is less or more privileged than others. Despite their many differences, they have been rendered equal by a decade of protracted violence and endemic fear. It is the fear of being marginalized, assimilated, or banished that accentuates the intensity of hostility between the warring communities."<sup>14</sup>

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13. Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987) 232-3.

14. Excerpted from Samir Khalaf, *Lebanon's Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 238-9.

The Palestinian 'guests' of Lebanon, 400,000 people who want nothing more than to return home to their houses in Palestine — the keys to which they zealously guard — find themselves between a hard place and a rock. The right-wing Maronite Christian forces, allied to Israel, who tore Lebanon apart beginning in April 1975, are still alive and well. Lebanese Sunni Muslims are themselves a minority. The leadership of the majority Shi'a Muslim community is split between Nabih Berri's Amal which led the attacks on the Palestinian camps from 1985 and the forces of Hizbullah, which gave many martyrs to the eviction of the Israelis and their Lebanese proxy army, and their stand — as explained to the writer by Maulana Fadlullah in 1993 — is that the Palestinians have the right and must return to Palestine; it would be treachery to suggest their permanent settlement in Lebanon. But for the bulk of the 1948 refugees in Lebanon that would mean returning to the heavily fortified Galilee area of what is now Israel and, given Israel's intransigence, might only be achieved with the total destruction of that colonial-settler state. So, that leaves the Palestinians where? At one stage, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt offered land in the Druze highlands to settle the Palestinians, which was met by an immediate outcry from Christian Lebanese. Reportedly there have been overtures by 'Iraqi-born Israeli ministers to the 'Iraqi government to settle the Palestinians of Lebanon in its vast desert: anywhere but here!

If the present 'peace talks' do not succeed to bring Arafat's capitulation to Israeli 'imperatives' and the *intifadah* uprising continues, Ariel Sharon, former Israeli Defence Minister, is waiting in the wings to lead the even more extreme Likud to power and this could mean more repression and even expulsions of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank of Palestine.

Until the world lifts the Zionist screen from its eyes, the Palestinian diaspora remains a forgotten victim of racist Zionism.

ALIYAH GORDON



The Crusades excited all of them. Every year, those French priests led a procession in which all the students of the Christian schools dressed in white tunics with square red crosses sewn front and back . . . . They carried palm branches through the streets of Beirut singing "I am a Christian. This is my glory, my hope, my support . . .". The next day at school they were proud of having defeated the Infidel. They dreamed of a Christianity with helmets and boots, riding its horses into the clash of arms, spearing Moslem foot-soldiers like so many St. Georges with so many dragons.

The Crusade which I always thought was impossible has, in fact, taken place. But it's not really religious. It's part of a larger Crusade directed against the poor. They bomb the underprivileged quarters because they consider the poor to be vermin they think will eat them. They fight to block the tide of those who have lost everything, or those who never had anything, and have nothing to lose. They have turned those among them that were poor against the poor "of others". They have perverted Charity at the heart of its roots.

Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose*,  
Transl. from the French by  
Georgina Kleege  
Post-Apollo Press, 1982, 47, 52



## TAL AL-ZA'ATAR

THE first several days of August 1976 witnessed intensified right-wing military activities, the main objective of which was to clear all areas north of Beirut of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Palestinian Resistance. The Mountain fronts were especially important to the right wing, which sought to isolate West Beirut from its sources of supply in the Shouf mountains.

On 6 August, after a fifteen-day siege without food and water, the town of Nabaa — close to Tal al-Za'atar and crucial to the camp's defenses — fell to Lebanese Front fascist militias. A group of Shi'a leaders, including Musa al-Sadr and Kamal al-As'ad, surrendered the quarter without consulting the defending garrison which battled on for another two days before being overcome. Lebanese Front militiamen then 'cleansed' Nabaa of its Shi'a inhabitants and fought each other over the spoils in two days' looting. The poor Armenian Christian quarter, Badawi, was the next to be 'cleansed,' the crime of its inhabitants having been to try to help the people of Nabaa.

Nabaa's fall precipitated the fall of Tal al-Za'atar. Rightist forces — including some regular Lebanese army units but not the Kata'ib — began the attack on the camp on June 22 but fared so badly in the first three days that the Kata'ib sent its troops into the battle to avert a fiasco. During the camp's more than seven weeks of resistance, its inhabitants lived on meager rations of lentils, and a drop of water became 'worth a pint of blood'. Each day some twenty-five people were killed and about a hundred wounded as they ventured out of shelters in search of water.

For four weeks, the Lebanese Front refused the International Red Cross (IRC) entry into the camp. When, on July 23, Jean Hoefiger and two other IRC officials were allowed in, they found 600–700 wounded and in desperate need of evacuation, together with children and others dying of dehydration, dysentery, and lack of medicine. Even the slightly wounded had developed gangrene. The fascist Front's conditions for evacuation of the

wounded meant that they would be gunned down before they reached the IRC convoy. Evacuation was brought to a halt after two days, when snipers fired on the wounded lying on stretchers on the ground, picking them off one by one with well-aimed single shots.

The camp fell on 12 August while al-Fatah was negotiating with the Kata'ib for its evacuation. Rightist forces deliberately stormed the camp before these arrangements could be carried out — if, indeed, the Kata'ib ever intended to carry them out — and also tricked the camp population into coming out into the open to face their fire. As the camp inhabitants streamed out, the rightist militias “fell on them like wolves”, arguing over how many Palestinians each group was entitled to execute and slaughtering them in cold blood. Entire families were killed. There was hardly a male between the ages of ten and fifty among those who managed to reach West Beirut. Boys of eight and ten were summarily executed. Girls no older than that were raped before being dispatched. All sixty camp nurses, women and men, were lined up two by two, marched out, and machine-gunned. Looters — often families of the killers — wore masks to protect themselves from the stench of rotting corpses.

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Sources: B.J. Odeh, *Lebanon Dynamics of Conflict* (London: Zed, 1985) 178, and Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987) 208–9.

## ABU MOHAMED AINA (50 YEARS OLD)

I was born in 1945 in Alma, in north Palestine. I have four brothers and four sisters. In 1948, we had to leave Palestine. My parents were very scared, and we were in such a hurry to leave that my mother completely forgot about my brother Kassem, who was then just a baby. We were well on our way, when my mother realized that Kassem was still in the house! My father went back to get Kassem, and we moved on to a place called Sultan Yaacub in a mountainous area of the Biq'a valley in eastern Lebanon. We stayed there for about a year. We had brought livestock along with us from Palestine, a few cows and mules. Winter that year was terrible. We had to sell everything to survive. When winter was over, and we had spent almost all of our savings, we moved to try our luck in Baalbak, an ancient town about an hour and a half's drive from the town of Barr Elias, at the foot of Sultan Yaacub Mountain. The situation there was about the same. There was no work, and we were hard up. My father was a farmer, and that is the only job he could do. We stayed in Baalbak for two years before my father decided to move to Barr Elias which has rich and fertile land, suitable for agriculture. It became the place we now call our hometown.

Until I was 16 years old, I studied in Barr Elias, before going to Beirut to stay with my sister who was already married and was living with her husband in Tal al-Za'atar refugee camp in East Beirut. I continued my studies at Sibling, a vocational training centre set up by UNRWA, in the south of Lebanon near Saida; I took up a telephone communications course. Life then was as good as one could expect, living as refugees in Lebanon.

After the April 1975 Phalange attack, I joined one of the political and military organizations, as any good Palestinian would do. I was then working in a telecommunications company in West Beirut, but staying in Tal al-Za'atar. The conflict in 1975, which resulted in the Lebanese civil war, spread like wildfire. The fascist Phalangists — Lebanese Christians — seized Tal al-Za'atar Camp. Kidnapping was rampant. People, especially boys and men, went missing without any trace. There were more than 20,000 Palestinians and 50,000 Lebanese living in the suburb of Tal al-Za'atar. People from the south migrated and stayed in this camp, which was surrounded by Phalangists living on the outskirts.

On 13 April 1975, people were celebrating a festival for the *Jami'ah 'Arabiyah*. On their way back by bus to Bourj al-Barajneh Camp from East Beirut, in the Christian Lebanese suburb of Ein al-Rumaneh, the bus was shot at by the Phalangists, and all the passengers, 27 people were killed. The passengers on the bus were not only Palestinians, but also Lebanese. This incident ignited the already tense situation, and civil war broke out. There were many different organizations then, but during that time they all came together, even Lebanese organizations, to fight against the Phalangists.

Tal al-Za'atar was under siege for a long time in different stages, with intermittent cease-fires, but the people stood firm until the last bullet was fired and the last morsel was eaten. The Lebanese shopkeepers, who had shops just outside the camps, opened up their shops to let us get some food to store during the last siege, which lasted for 90 days, before the camp finally fell.

During the attack on Tal al-Za'atar, kidnappings from every side — the Palestinians, the Lebanese and the Phalangists — were the usual thing. Kidnapping became the power of control over the enemy. Fighters from the camp stationed themselves outside on the hilly area around the camp because the camp was not a suitable place from which to fight. All the houses and buildings in the camp were made of zinc, and the roofs could not support the fighters.

On 19 May 1975, I was injured for the first time. My leg was injured from the shelling and needed to be operated on. It was arranged for me to be driven out by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in one of the many ambulances going out in a convoy to a hospital in the city. There was no hospital in the camp, only two doctors, but they couldn't carry out surgery due to the lack of instruments, medicine, water, electricity: everything. On the way, our convoy was shot at although there was an agreement with the government that all injured people from the camp could be treated outside. They were not supposed to shoot at ambulances. Four of the ambulance drivers were injured and three nurses died. The driver of the ambulance I was in was shot in the chest, but he drove on until we reached the Palestinian Al-Quds hospital in Hazmiyeh, in the suburbs of Beirut, also a Phalange area. That same day the driver and I were operated on. After that, along with all of the other patients, we were evacuated to Tariq al-Jadidah, because the Phalange threatened to bomb Al-Quds hospital.

I had to stay out of Tal al-Za'atar camp for two months. In January 1976, the area of Karantina, in the suburbs of Tal al-Za'atar, was over-run by the Phalangists, who killed or deported the inhabitants. The Palestinians and the progressive Lebanese people then counter-attacked Christian Damour to the south of Beirut and occupied the area in revenge. Then the final siege of Tal al-Za'atar started in March 1976. At that time, I was still working in West Beirut and my sister and her family remained inside the camp. The people inside were getting low on rations as by then it was dangerous to go in and out. I had arranged to be smuggled in, along with 17 other men and a woman, bringing with us supplies of food, medicine, ammunition, cigarettes and telephone equipment to enable the fighters to contact their colleagues in West Beirut. This was the second time I was smuggled in and out of the camp. We went via the mountainside at night and managed to arrive in the camp safely. However, while we were taking a break after reaching the camp, the fighting started, so we had to join and I was made a leader in the al-Massana (factory) area. We received about 60-90 shelling per minute, day and night, non-stop. The building we were in caught fire and so did almost all the houses in the camp. Everything was burning. But we still fought on.

During the time between sieges, people joined together to dig shelters for the camp dwellers. There were about five shelters in the camp. Besides the fighters and the people in the camp, students from the 'Arab University also came secretly to help dig shelters. We had one under the masjid that we turned into a makeshift hospital. The shelters could not accommodate all the camp population. Many did not have the chance to use them. Some were forced to take shelter behind high buildings to escape the shelling. Many people died because of the shortage of medicine. They did not die of actual wounds, but from infection and loss of blood. We made bandages from blankets and sheets which we tore into pieces, dipped in salt and water, and applied directly to the wounds to stop the bleeding. During those days I saw many things that will stay inside me forever. One of them was the killing of 16 teenagers who were trying to reach our position to help defend the camp. They were murdered while climbing the hill in the middle of the fighting.

Because of water and food shortages we were forced to risk going out at night to get food from nearby Lebanese shops which had been abandoned. There we found only lentils, sacks and sacks full of lentils. We brought back as many as we could.

There were so many sacks of lentils that we used them as sand-bags! That is what kept us alive. We had lentils for breakfast, lunch and dinner every day until the day the camp fell.

Water became the most serious problem. We had to risk the threat of snipers to get water from the tank which was situated about 20 feet away from the Phalangist area. Because there was no water, the women could not make bread. Many people died trying to get water. The water tank was like a death trap because it was situated in an open area. Snipers were everywhere, and even when someone tried to take the injured away from the water tank area, they were shot at. I heard that on one occasion a woman was shot at while trying to get back after collecting water. She was shot in the chest, but kept on running clutching the water holder until she reached safety because to her the water was more important than her life. Then, one litre of water was equal to one litre of blood.

The Phalangists killed according to their moods. There was a story about a group of women who managed to reach the water tank and were busy getting water when the Phalangists shouted to them not to make so much noise. They took potshots at the women just to scare them off. When they felt like shooting, the Phalangists never missed.

One day when I was taking supplies to al-Fanar, which was a Lebanese progressive area about two-and-a-half hours' walk away from our place, I was hit on the head by a sniper. Luckily it was not a serious wound. Three months later, I was injured again, this time in my leg.

At one time, our position was under threat. We were surrounded. The area below us had fallen to the Phalangists, and the area above us was also a Phalangist area. Our position was the stronghold of the camp and it was heavily guarded. Although threatened, we never gave up our position, and the Phalangists could not pass us to get into the camp. Now everything had to be done at night to minimize risks. Food and water supplies were brought in only at night. The shifts of fighters and sentries were also changed at night.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> day there were heavy attacks, and I saw the enemy coming. They used all sorts of weapons and ammunition which were superior to ours. But we did not stop shooting, until suddenly we saw tanks coming our way. After that I was momentarily blinded from a shell when a piece of metal struck

my eyes. Until today, the shrapnel, which was imbedded about 15 cm. deep, is still inside my head. I don't know how I managed to run to the 'hospital' inside the camp, and I was told that for two days I lay there unconscious. I lost my sight when I regained consciousness. I stayed in the 'hospital', which was filling up by the minute, for 35 days. During the fighting, the Red Cross arranged for the injured to be transferred outside the camp for treatment. Trucks and buses were turned into ambulances to transport the injured. I secretly hoped that I would be one of those on the list for transfer.

I was put in the second group in one of the buses, among those who could sit up, although wounded. It took us three hours to reach West Beirut because we were stopped at every check-point. The civilian Phalangists threw stones and garbage at the trucks and buses. After the last group left, nobody left the camp for 10 days. On 13 August, the massacre of Tal al-Za'atar took place. The people were going out of the camp with the promise of a cease-fire to ensure their safety but, as they say, one cannot trust one's enemy. They were all like sitting-ducks, and they never saw life again. All were children and women. There were no men trying to leave the camp, as they were fighting. About 5,500 people were killed. In the camp, about 700-800 people died from the bombings, trapped in a fallen building. Only 12 survived. In other areas, a family of 50 people was totally wiped out. Many of the nurses died in the fallen camp, but the two doctors were spared, although they disappeared after that.

We were taken to Akka Hospital first, and then I was taken to Makassed Hospital for an eye operation, carried out by Dr. Najdeh. My left eye could still be saved. After that, for two years, I went through a series of operations, including one in Spain. But there is little improvement. Then in 1982, I went to stay in Damour for about five years. I got married there, and now I have two sons and two girls. In 1987, I moved back to Barr Elias with my family, and have been living there ever since. I can't work now because of my poor eyesight. My wife is the breadwinner of this family. She works in a kindergarten near our house, to put food on the table. Life is very difficult now because I cannot work. The Palestinians in Lebanon are a forgotten lot. I wish life for my children would be better, but I truly don't know what is going to happen now.

## LAILA TO'MI OMAR (51 YEARS OLD)

IT was 1976. I cannot remember the exact date. We were then living in Tal al-Za'atar Camp in East Beirut. We had not been able to go out of the camp for about a year. Food was scarce and water was a luxury. The water pump from the well had broken, so we had to fetch water by hand using a rope and bucket. Many people died trying to get water, because the well was in an open area near the Kata'ib side, so snipers had an easy target. They knew we had to have water, so they just waited and shot anybody who dared to risk their lives, usually women or children.

Two months previously, I had given birth to a baby girl. I was not in the best of condition while carrying her, and I found out later that this affected my baby's health. My poor baby suffers from thalassemia,<sup>1</sup> a blood condition which destroys the red cells.

The situation in Tal al-Za'atar went from bad to worse. The siege lasted longer each time the Kata'ib launched their attack. The bombing, shooting and fighting increased and went on continuously. Weeks or months before that, my husband had taken two of our children to West Beirut for safety. When the people in Tal al-Za'atar started to form a group to leave the camp, I joined them. Some of the men went up to the mountain to be on the safe side.

The next morning we — mainly women, children and the elderly — trudged along a path, a small path, I have forgotten its name, to go down to Beirut. When we passed the Kata'ib checkpoint, we had to endure body searches by male soldiers. Any money, jewellery, valuables from our houses, or anything that they liked or that was of any value, was taken by the Kata'ib. We were forced to leave with just the clothes on our backs. I was carrying my baby, and tagging along beside me were my other two small children. It took us almost a day to walk from Tal al-Za'atar to Beirut, when ordinarily it would only take a few minutes by car.

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1. Ed. Note: Thalassemia is an inherited condition, not caused by a mother's ill-health, but this was Laila's understanding.

The Kata'ib did not only take money and valuables; they also took away young women, teenage girls and boys, and some men who had decided to come along with us. Until today we do not know what happened to them because we never heard of them ever again. We were shot at from the surrounding mountains, time and again. There were about 500 of us who tried to escape that day, but many did not make it.

Besides those taken away by the Kata'ib, some were shot and killed. Later, we found out that the road which we had taken was supposed to be the safest road out of the camp!

We arrived at the place called Mathaf, in the area of the Museum, the crossing-point between East and West Beirut. It was already evening, and most of us separated and went our way. I continued to walk to Shatila which was only a few metres away. There to my greatest joy, my family were waiting for me. But I lost most of my relatives in Tal al-Za'atar. About 30 of them were killed during the siege.

In West Beirut, we stayed in an area beside the sea, called Rouche, in a half-destroyed hotel. It was a small room, but with a kitchen and a bathroom. We stayed there, all seven of us, for six years, until 1982. Life was difficult. There was no water, no electricity and the hotel's condition was terrible. The stairway and corridors were dark, dirty, damp and smelly. The hotel was not fit for anyone to live in.

Through all that I faced another dilemma. My husband wanted more children. I objected because I felt it was unfair to bring a child into such terrible and hazardous conditions. Nobody deserved to live like that, like garbage. That was how we were living. However, my husband insisted, and in our conservative tradition a wife cannot disobey her husband. So we had another child in 1984.

My husband was a teacher in the UNRWA school in Mar Elias Camp, about 10 km. from our house. According to the standard of living then we were actually considered to be among the better-off families. Salaries paid by UNRWA were high compared to those of other jobs available to Palestinians. At least we could buy our own food.

However, our good life was not meant to last for long. A year after I gave birth to our youngest daughter, my husband died during the bombing of Mar Elias Camp in 1985. What was I supposed to do with five children and no work? I suffered a

severe nervous breakdown. Two of my children were sent to a foster home in Nahr al-Barid in the north, so that at least they could continue their schooling. I have suffered so much in this country. God help me, but I want so much to go home. I don't have much of a life now.

## MARIAM KHADOURA (47 YEARS OLD)

**M**Y family did not live in a camp designated for refugees when we first came here in 1948 from a small village in Akka, Palestine. As it was, we did not encounter most of the difficulties faced by others who were staying in camps. I don't remember much of how life was then, but my life took a turn when I was 16 years old. As was the tradition, my marriage was arranged, and immediately afterwards I accompanied my husband to Tal al-Za'atar Camp in East Beirut, where he worked as a carpenter.

For 12 years, we lived a good and happy life together with our five children, three boys and two girls. Then in 1975, everything changed. The war was upon us. The longest and the final siege of the Tal al-Za'atar Camp was from March to August 1976. It was the most difficult time for everyone of us. My eldest child was only eight years old, and I was pregnant with my youngest son. There was no food and no water. My husband, along with many others, disappeared after they went up the mountain to fight the Kata'ib.

One day, I and a few others had to take the risk to fetch water. Our water source was a well near one end of the camp, an open area and an easy target for the Kata'ib snipers surrounding the camp. Many had died trying to reach the well. These killers would shoot whenever they felt like shooting, so sometimes there were only a few of us who could safely manage to get water. We had hoped that day would be one such 'safe' day. Then all of a sudden, a shot rang out, and a man who was with us and who had reached the edge of the well, fell into the well. We waited for a few minutes, lying on the ground, then on hearing nothing, crawled to the well, pulled the body out, took our ration of water, and ran back. This was not the first time we had to drink bloodied water. We had no choice but to take the water and drink of it. My God, we had to stay alive.

We left the next day, my children and I. We smuggled ourselves out at four in the morning and made our way by walking down to Dekwaneh, a few kilometres away from the camp. There we took refuge in a car belonging to a Lebanese man who took pity on us. He agreed to take us to Mathaf, the crossing-point from East to West Beirut. At that time it was almost impossible for Palestinians to travel, and it was also dangerous for any Lebanese to help a Palestinian. They could easily be shot if

caught with Palestinians in their vehicles. I don't know how we got through, but from Mathaf we went further down to Damour, formerly a Christian village south of Beirut, on the road to Saida in the south of Lebanon. We reached Damour at about 12.00 noon.

We searched around and found a square box for a shelter. There were no windows and no door, just an opening. We had nothing except the clothes on our backs. Some Palestinians who were already in that area gave us some food and water. Thus started a new beginning to our lives in Damour. I worked cleaning houses and selling sweets to enable me to take care of my children. We stayed there until we were uprooted again by another war; this time the Israeli invasion of 1982, which totally destroyed Damour. So I decided to take the children to Talabaya in the Biqa'a, and here we have stayed to this day.

Today, life is still difficult. As you can see, I am still working to survive. My children are doing better in their lives. At least I have managed to give them the education they need. My daughters are now married, my eldest son is working in Beirut, and he contributes to the family's budget. The youngest, who is just 18 years old, is still studying.

Of course, I want to go back to Palestine. My parents died here in Lebanon, but I want to die in Palestine.



"There is a popular Israeli folk song about a young suitor and his beloved that accurately describes the Israeli-American relationship leading up to the war in Lebanon ... . The suitor, wondering if the nay he heard from his beloved may actually have been a yea, asks in the song's refrain: 'What is it you mean when you say nay? You say it with such charm, it sounds rather like yea'. Like the young suitor in the folk song, the Israeli government had good reason to believe that even when its representatives heard a nay from Washington prior to the invasion of Lebanon, the word sounded every bit like a yea."<sup>1</sup>

The representative whose 'nay' sounded like a 'yea' has been pin-pointed by senior State Department officials as U.S. Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. He is said to have done so by 'winks and nods'. "There is no question about it, Haig believed that Israel was doing our work for us in Lebanon."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Zeev Schiff, "The Green Light", *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1983. Zeev Schiff was Defence and Military Editor at *Haaretz*, an Israeli daily newspaper.
  2. James McCartney, "Officials say Haig let Israel think U.S. condoned the invasion of Lebanon", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 January 1983.

## ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANON

WHILE on 6 June 1982 various Israeli government spokesmen argued that "Israel's sole purpose is to destroy the PLO's infrastructure in southern Lebanon", over the next few months the growing controversy in Israel and within the Israeli cabinet itself resulted in revelations concerning the war's goals:

- (a) destroying the PLO military infrastructure in South Lebanon and creating a security zone of some forty kilometres, the effective range of the PLO's artillery and rocket launchers;
- (b) destroying the PLO's position in the rest of Lebanon, particularly in Beirut, to eliminate its role in the Lebanese political system and to marginalize PLO's rightful central position in the 'Arab-Israeli conflict;
- (c) defeating the Syrian army in Lebanon to effect its full or partial withdrawal and to pre-empt the possibility of a Syrian-Israeli war;
- (d) facilitating the reconstruction of the Lebanese state and political system under the hegemony of Israel's allies: Bashir Gemayel and the Lebanese Front.

The dominant figure in the new Israeli Likud government was the hard-line Minister of Defence Ariel Sharon, who had been instrumental in the formation of the Likud bloc and since 1977 in the development of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and of infrastructure in the West Bank tied to Israel. Sharon had come nearly to monopolize Israel's defence and to a certain extent its foreign policy.

Israel's sense of its own power and confidence was bolstered by the 'Arab-Israeli military and political balance. Egypt was no longer a factor, through Sadat's policy. Iraq was bogged down in its campaign against Iran, and Syrian-Jordanian relations were in a state of active hostility. Israel enjoyed a clear military superiority and could act with apparent impunity as long

as the support of the United States was guaranteed. Israel's confidence led them virtually to annex the Jowlan (Golan) Heights in December 1981.

Sharon's invasion plan was carried out in conjunction with Bashir Gemayel of the Lebanese Front, Israel's right-wing ally. It was intended that he would be elected President of Lebanon, and the Lebanese political system would be reconstructed under a pro-Israeli head of state.

Although the Lebanese cabinet at the start of the Israeli invasion called on the army to oppose the aggression by all means at its disposal, Gemayel and the Commander-in-Chief Khoury failed to order the army to resist; it remained in the barracks throughout the invasion. PLO's southern commander Haj Ismail deserted, as did PLO's south Bija'a commander Abu Hajem, who fled on the first day. PLO forces withdrew from the south to Beirut where it concentrated its combatants in the city's western and southern sections. Part of the population of mostly Christian East Beirut welcomed the Israeli aggressors with flowers and kisses, and in the south that part of the Shi'a population in and around Major Sa'ad Haddad's army collaborated, their gangs moving in under Israeli protection to kidnap and kill Palestinians and their Lebanese allies.

Syria's policy was to avoid direct confrontation with the Israelis notwithstanding that the Israeli airforce destroyed the Syrian ground-to-air missile centre in Lebanon and shot down several dozen Syrian fighter planes. Syria's seeking an early cease-fire on 11 June, had left Israel free to focus on Beirut.

Israeli forces continued their advance towards South and East Beirut and established a territorial link with the forces of the right-wing Lebanese Front. Apparently Israel expected the forces of the Lebanese Front to capture West Beirut and complete the rout of the PLO. But whatever had been the understanding between Israel and Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Lebanese Front had no intention of storming West Beirut, and his forces' military activity remained negligible. With thousands of PLO combatants in West Beirut, any attempt to take that part of the city by force was not likely to succeed, and most likely to be very costly, an important consideration for the Lebanese Front leader, of a small force representing a community "haunted by a sense of steady demographic retrenchment". To send his men to storm West Beirut under an Israeli umbrella leading to massive destruction and bloodshed might affect Bashir Gemayel's

prospects of becoming the legitimate president of Lebanon. From Israel's point of view the Front was to help liberate its country and to pave its own rise to power. From Gemayel's point of view, if Israel wanted to act as a regional power and bring about political changes through a military campaign, it ought to pay the price for the capture of West Beirut. Gemayel would have calculated that Israel could not afford to let the PLO stay in West Beirut, which would constitute a self-defined political defeat, and a victory for the Palestinians.

Thus Israel began a 10-week siege of Beirut which resulted in a few rounds of fighting with Syrian army units controlling dominant positions in the hills east of Beirut and near the Beirut-Damascus highway. To sustain a credible threat of an imminent invasion of West Beirut, the Israelis carried out shellings, air raids, and limited ground operations directed mainly, but not exclusively at Palestinian targets, and tightened the siege in an effort to turn the civilian population against the PLO and its allied Lebanese militias. These were harsh measures. In August, the Israelis escalated their air and ground assaults. The fierce attacks, especially on August 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, were among the most controversial measures of the war. But they served to persuade PLO that a full-blown Israeli attack was imminent, and thus enabled Philip C. Habib to negotiate the agreement for the PLO's evacuation of Beirut by the end of August, with the assurance of the safety of the unarmed Palestinian women, children, and old men remaining in the Palestinian camps of Beirut. Israel's charade worked!

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Source: Excerpted from Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon, 1970-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, rev. edn., 1986) 122, 127, 128, 138-9, 141; and Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1987) 280-1.

KASSEM AINA (BORN 16 OCTOBER 1946)  
Director of Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS)  
(Home for the Children of the Steadfast)

*Day One: Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2.00 p.m., 1982*

THE children aged between 1½ and 6 years were sleeping. Those aged 6–12 were having their Scouts' activities in the institution's playground. We had two guests, the Egyptian poet Zein al-Abidine and an Algerian lady, Taibeh Nafisah. Both guests, with the Chairman of the Palestinian Women's General Union, the poet May Sayegh, and myself were having lunch in the institution. Suddenly, Israeli planes passed over, heading towards the Sports City to hit the Palestinian fighters located there. By penetrating the sound barrier, the planes made a terrible sound, shaking the whole area, while the windows shattered, spreading horror among the young sleeping children. All the children and working staff of BAS were asked to gather inside the building. The oldest children started singing and repeating their scout slogans to help the young kids forget their fear. At 6.00 p.m. the children were moved by bus to the Ein al-Mreisseh area near the U.S. Embassy, as a precaution against the continuous air raids in the Bir Hassan area and its surroundings.

*Day Two: 7<sup>th</sup> June*

At 4.00 o'clock in the morning, the children were moved again 20 km. to the mountain village of Souk al-Gharb. There we had repaired an old abandoned hotel, which we used during difficult crises as well as for summer vacations.

On that day, I left my six-months-pregnant wife, who was working with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) to continue her duties, and headed with the children towards the unknown. At Souk al-Gharb, we had the huge responsibility of providing security for those children, most of whom were parentless.

We decided to divide the children into small groups of five kids each; each group to have kids of different ages and distributing children from the same family to different groups, especially those who had lost both parents. This was a precaution in case Israel started shelling the area, so that members of the same family would not be facing death together.

The children, spread out under the surrounding trees of their new location, were able to hear the horrible sounds of shelling

and bombardment and to see clearly the planes and ships pounding the city of Beirut, while fire spread everywhere. The kids stayed under the trees from dawn till nightfall; during that time the workers and eldest children took care of providing food and water, distributing it among the groups. For four days we kept moving between the hotel building and our shelter under the trees.

*Day 6: 11<sup>th</sup> June*

We decided to evacuate the boys over 14 years, along with the cook and *dabkeh*<sup>3</sup> trainer, to avoid actions of revenge against them by the Israelis and to prevent them being taken as prisoners.

Their destination was the Biqa'a, and from there to Syria. After a very sad farewell, as we did not know what destiny was in store for all of us, the company left at 10.00 o'clock that night. The Medierij area, 22 km. up the mountain from Souk al-Gharb, which leads to Chtura on the international road to Syria, was a target of heavy bombardment, and the group failed to cross, so they returned to Souk al-Gharb. On the next day, they tried again, and were able to travel 50 km. to the UNRWA school inside the town of Talabaya in the Biqa'a, as their first stop.

*Day 8: 13<sup>th</sup> June*

We were out of food, so I decided to go the 47 km. to Chtura to buy some flour and other food. I left at 10.00 a.m.; the road was extremely dangerous, but the children had to eat. Alhamdulillah, I was able to return with the needed food supplies and was back in Souk al-Gharb at 1.30 p.m. It was a very happy reunion with the children, especially as the only men left with them were myself and the driver. We were determined to stay, and as the children said, we have *al-Haq* — The Right — on our side; we have the right in our country.

Unfortunately, the Israelis were able to move forward inside the mountain area and were very close to our location. At 3.00 o'clock that morning, we received an order from the Lebanese National Movement and the Palestinian Forces that we should

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3. *Dabkeh* is a popular group dance common to Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, with slight differences. It is characterized by dancers holding hands tightly and vigorously beating the ground with their feet in keeping with the music.

withdraw from the area and immediately evacuate the children, because their presence would confuse movement of their forces.

Knowing how scared the children were, although they tried not to show it, and how great the responsibility of risking their lives, especially as some of them had seen the killing of their parents in Tal al-Za'atar Camp in 1975, I decided we should leave for the Biqa'a valley and from there to a safe area.

There was one driver for a large number: 180 children and 25 women. I gathered the eldest girls with the workers and discussed how we should leave on foot for the town of Aley, 15 km. away, and there try to find transportation to the Biqa'a. Right away we started on our plan, a large caravan of frustrated, speechless children and women heading towards the unknown. It was not fear that dominated and filled our hearts, but a deep and great sadness and anger at having to leave in such a humiliating way, that we all hated.

After leaving the place that had sheltered us for one week, we passed another institution, 'Isa'ad al-Tufoulah', an orphanage for martyrs' children and hardship cases, where we found 50 kids left under the care of a few workers, with no one left from the administration. So we asked them to join us; thus our number increased, children as well as adults, one large group leaving Souk al-Gharb village on foot towards the town of Aley. Reaching our destination, we discovered that cars were scarce, so we had to use whatever transportation was available; we had to push ten kids inside a small van. It was the most exhausting trip ever, not because of the transportation, but due to the horrifying scenes the children had to witness. All along the roads, destruction, fire, gas stations burning, dead bodies scattered, especially at the junction where the road links the mountain with the Biqa'a valley, which the Israeli planes raided several times.

Alhamdulillah, no one was hurt, and by nightfall, nearly 7.00 p.m., we arrived at Chtura, where a number of our institution's sons were waiting for us, so scared and frustrated because we were late that angrily they had accused one of the military leaders of being unable to secure our safety. Nevertheless, we were safe and sound; the reunion was very touching, especially between kids from the same family. Chtura was a city of ghosts. The once most active city in the Biqa'a was empty except for fighters moving around with their weapons. Shops, restaurants and institutions were all closed; the roads were blocked due to large holes from the shelling, hindering cars from moving freely.

At 8.00 p.m. we decided to leave the Biqa'a heading towards Syria to the 'Educational City for the Martyrs' sons of Palestine'. The way from Chtura to the Syrian border was extremely terrifying and dark, except for some car lights, and there were terrible sounds of military tanks moving towards the border.

These were the most frightening moments. All the way we were asking Allah to protect these children from the Israeli planes. As soon as we arrived at the Lebanese check-point at the border (al-Masna'a), a terrible scene was awaiting us, the administration offices were blazing with fire, as the planes had raided the area a few minutes before our arrival. We had no choice but to surrender to Allah's will and continue on our way. Upon reaching the Syrian check-point (Jdiadit Yabus), we were received by some Palestinian officers, who accompanied us to the Educational City, where we arrived at one o'clock in the morning of Sunday, 14 June 1982, day nine of the children's saga.

The institution was not equipped to receive that number of children. However, the director and all the working staff did their best to provide us with all possible facilities.

Thus our children, during such a short period of their lives, had to pass through these bitter experiences, losing their parents and homes at Tal al-Za'atar, then the loss of their second home (BAS), our institution at Bir Hassan, and then even their third shelter at Souk al-Gharb ... it was another part of the long, tiring trip of alienation from our homeland Palestine. Wondering: shall we see it again?

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N.B. The Bait Atfal as-Samoud house at Bir Hassan, with all its furnishings and equipment, was handed over as a present to the Lebanese 'Islamic Orphanage' and is presently used as an institution for mentally retarded children.



Letter of Philip C. Habib, U.S. President Reagan's Special Negotiator in Lebanon, addressed to the Lebanese Prime Minister:

"With reference to our many discussions ... I am pleased to inform you that the government of Israel has assured the United States government that the plan for the departure of the PLO is acceptable... . On the basis of these assurances, the United States government is confident that the government of Israel will not interfere with the implementation of this plan for the departure from Lebanon of the PLO leadership, offices and combatants in a manner which will:

(A) Assure the safety of such departing personnel;

(B) Assure the safety of other persons in the area... .

"I would also like to assure you that the United States government fully recognizes the importance of these assurances from the government of Israel and that my government will do its utmost to ensure that these assurances are scrupulously observed."



## SABRA-SHATILA MASSACRE

WHO killed Bashir Gemayel on 14 September 1982? While the Israeli government insisted on a full and open relationship with the new Lebanese government that they anticipated Bashir Gemayel would lead, culminating in a peace treaty, the president-elect preferred that his alliance with Israel be informal and practical. This difference surfaced during a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Gemayel in Nahariyya in northern Israel in early September. Gemayel's concept of a strong central government included the extension of its authority over South Lebanon at the expense of Israel's reliable local ally, Sa'ad Haddad. Israel refused to jettison Haddad who had demonstrated his reliability and effectiveness in maintaining a *cordon sanitaire*, while the Phalange — the Lebanese Forces — had not.

When Bashir was assassinated, there was no other Maronite leader with the capacity to govern Lebanon who had a political orientation acceptable to Israel, let alone pro-Israel. Furthermore, Syria and PLO still controlled a large part of Lebanon. Under these circumstances, the Israeli leadership hastily dispatched the Israeli army into West Beirut, justifying its decision by the need to maintain order and security after the assassination of the president-elect.

The inspiration for the 'cleansing' or 'purification' of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in south Beirut was the Deir Yassin massacre of 9–10 April 1948 when Begin's Irgun killed 254 defenceless inhabitants of this Palestinian village, and contributed to the panic flight of more than 600,000 Palestinians living in what became Israel. On several occasions, *Time* reported that Gemayel told Israeli officials he would like to raze the camps and turn them into tennis courts. Gemayel had sent 500 of his troops to Israel in early 1982 for special training. These troops were selected for the cleansing of Sabra and Shatila.

The agreement negotiated by Habib with the PLO for the departure of PLO fighters contained guarantees for the future

safety of half a million Palestinians living in Lebanon and stressed Washington's opposition to Israel's entry into West Beirut, including the camps. On 25 August some 800 American Marines arrived in Beirut to constitute, with French and Italian contingents, a Multi-National Force (MNF) to supervise the PLO withdrawal and to assure the protection of the Palestinians in Lebanon. The MNF was scheduled to remain until 26 September, but departed on 10–13 September once the PLO evacuated, thereby unilaterally repudiating the second part of its mission: the protection of Palestinians and other civilians.

The bomb that killed Bashir Gemayel and thirty of his associates in the Lebanese Front occurred at its Ashrafiyya headquarters where the leaders met weekly, but absent from this meeting was Elias Hobeika, leader of the Lebanese Forces' extremely pro-Israel faction and the man in charge of Gemayel's security. The Kata'ib never revealed the results of its own investigation.

Only hours after the explosion that killed Bashir Gemayel, on Wednesday, 15 September, the Israeli Chief of Staff, General Rafael Eitan and Israeli Defence Force (IDF) commander General Amir Drori in a meeting with Hobeika planned the 'mopping-up' of alleged remaining terrorists in the camps. It was Hobeika who personally supervised the Kata'ib massacre of thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese in Tal al-Za'atar refugee camp in East Beirut in 1976, and it was he who would lead this mission. Hobeika's unit in the Kata'ib had never participated in battles. Its speciality was massacre, as Israeli leaders knew well.

Two hours after this meeting Israeli planes started making low-level flights over the camps, which later in the day were also subjected to artillery and tank shelling. The rapidity with which the IDF and its closest Lebanese Forces allies exploited Gemayel's assassination lent credence to the rumour that the Israelis and Hobeika's extremist pro-Israeli faction had killed him. The Israeli leaders knew what Hobeika intended. On the night of 15 September, General Eitan told the Israeli cabinet: "I see in their eyes what they [Kata'ib] are waiting for. It is enough that Amin Gemayel used the word revenge, and the whole lot of them were already sharpening their knives." At a meeting of top Israeli commanders with Hobeika the next day, it was emphasized that a *kasach* (slicing) operation would be carried out in the camps.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, Israeli paratroopers were ordered to facilitate Kata'ib's entry into the camps. The IDF supplied aerial photo-

graphs and maps of these camps and other essential assistance during the operation, including issuing loud-speaker orders in 'Arabic to camp inhabitants, resupplying militias and, on the second day, allowing reinforcements to enter the camps, which ensured a new wave of killings on Friday. The IDF command post 200 metres from the camps had received information that a massacre was under way just after the beginning of the slaughter the day before, but it did nothing to stop the slaughter and in fact permitted fresh reinforcements of killers to enter the camps the next day. The victims were killed not only by shooting but, so as not to alert other parts of the camp, especially by knives, axes and hatchets; their throats were slit, their bellies ripped open. Even children were often tortured before they were killed. On Thursday night, Hobeika reported to the IDF command that 300 civilians had been killed. Twenty senior officers in Tel Aviv, as well as the Israeli command in Beirut, saw this report, but no one moved to stop the slaughter.

The sector of the camps where the greater part of the killing occurred was clearly visible from the top of Israel's 7-storey command post nearby. In plain sight of the command post, the Lebanese Forces dug a ditch into which bulldozers — lent by IDF — dumped hundreds of bodies. Bulldozers also razed houses and so buried the bodies of many victims in the rubble.

Israeli soldiers turned back, or blocked the way, to people trying to escape from the camp. The International Commission<sup>1</sup> concluded:

... Israeli soldiers seemed to be operating under orders not to allow any inhabitants of the camps to escape, despite Israeli awareness that civilians were being killed in large numbers and that a massacre of some sort was underway.<sup>2</sup>

The International Commission stated the most conclusive evidence of the intentional deceit of the Israeli and Kata'ib allegations about '2,000 terrorists remaining in the camps':

There was absolutely no resistance to the massacres... .  
The militiamen suffered virtually no casualties in their

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1. *Israel in Lebanon: Report of the International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International Law by Israel during its invasion of the Lebanon* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983).

2. *Ibid.*, 178.

execution of the massacres ... there were no signs of even the slightest resistance ... an Oxfam field worker cites a sporting pellet gun lying beside the corpse of a young boy as epitomizing the total defenselessness of the camp population.<sup>3</sup>

While Yassir Arafat declared that more than 3,200 Palestinians were killed, the exact number could never be determined because most of the bodies were buried in the rubble of houses razed by bulldozers. A respected and well-known Israeli journalist, Amon Kapeliouk, after a careful investigation, found the number killed to be between 3,000 and 3,500, 700–800 of whom were Lebanese.<sup>4</sup> Official Israeli sources admit to 7–800.

Shortly before the invasion, Kapeliouk had called attention to an alarming phenomena in Israel: the writings and teachings of certain rabbis, former military chaplains, who insisted that the Bible orders the expulsion of the 'Arabs, and in wartime the killing and extermination of non-Jews, including babies and their mothers.<sup>5</sup> "No religious authority, no rabbi, has spoken against this kind of racist talk."

General Avigdor Ben-Gal, then commander of Israel's northern district, considered Palestinians within Israel as "a cancer in the body of the country"; to Ariel Sharon, who threatened them with expulsion, they were "foreigners"; General Eitan likened the Palestinians in the West Bank to "drunken cockroaches in a bottle"; Begin told the Knesset on 8 June 1982 that Palestinian fighters were "beasts walking on two paws".<sup>6</sup> Israeli society went through a process of dehumanization and fascisization of its values. All this in line with former Prime Minister Golda Meir's dictum: "The Palestinian people do not exist".

At writing — year 2000 — the victims of Sabra-Shatila have not been exhumed and properly buried, nor is there a commemorative stone to remind the world of this inhuman transgression. The Lebanese government has even spoken of razing what remains of the camp to make way for development.

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3. Ibid., 170.

4. Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987) 288, citing Amnon (*sic*) Kapeliouk, *Enquete sur un Massacre* (Paris, 1982).

5. Tabitha Petran, *op. cit.*, 289–90, citing Kapeliouk, "Une strategie radicale", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 1982.

6. Tabitha Petran, *op. cit.*, 290.

## SOUAD SROUR MERII (29 YEARS OLD)

I was born in Shatila along with eight other siblings, five boys and three girls. I was the eldest. The story I am about to tell you is what happened to me and my family in the massacre at Sabra-Shatila during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. It happened on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> September, after the assassination on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel, who was the leader of the Lebanese Forces, or the fascist Christian militia called Kata'ib (Phalange). This party was very well known for its hatred towards Palestinians and for its collaboration with Israel. In 1976, Gemayel and his party were responsible for demolishing three camps that existed in the area under his control, and they slaughtered or kicked out the inhabitants, who are still displaced refugees today. Shortly after the announcement of the death of the president-elect, the shelling and sniping increased at Shatila Camp.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> September, at 5.00 o'clock in the evening, I left my house to go to one of the shelters where my friends were hiding from the shelling and sniping. At the corner of my house, I was stopped by three civilian men who asked me if the place was Shatila Camp. Although they spoke in 'Arabic, from their accent I realized immediately they were strangers. They left after I gave them a negative answer.

I reached the shelter and informed my friends about what had happened on my way. After staying in the shelter for one hour, I left, promising my friends to go back for them to take them to sleep at my place because the shelter was unhealthy, very humid, and had neither water nor electricity.

I went home, prepared dinner for my young sisters and brothers, fed them and put them to sleep. My father refused to let me go alone to the shelter to pick up my friends. He asked me to take my brother Maher with me. At that time I was 17 and my brother was 12 years old. Shortly before we reached the shelter, we started seeing horrible scenes: bodies lying on the ground with blood flowing out of them. We heard moaning voices and people screaming with pain. Suddenly I was called by a voice that I knew to be that of our neighbour Abu Rida, who wanted us to help him. "They slaughtered us, killed us, raped the girls and took away all the girls between 12 and 16 years old." Then he told us, "Escape from your house, don't stay in it. They will

come back and kill all the people in the camp". I inquired about who did that, but suddenly we heard a voice shouting, "You dogs are still alive? Not dead yet?" We ran away back home in order to tell our parents of the horrible events. We informed our father about what happened and about the advice of our neighbour. My father said, "Nothing will happen to us if God forbids. He created us and only He will end our lives". We stayed in our house till the dawn of the next day, Friday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of September. On that night we had our neighbour with us, a pregnant woman who did not know anyone except us.

At 4.30 the next morning, our neighbour and my 11-year old brother decided to go up to the roof of the house to see what was going on in order to decide whether to stay at home or run away. They were seen by the militia men stationed on the hills of the stadium overlooking the camp. My brother and our neighbour were frightened and came down quickly and told us what they saw, and shortly afterwards, we heard somebody knocking at the door. My father inquired who was knocking and was told they were Israelis who wanted to search the house. He opened the door and we saw 13 armed men outside our door. Some stayed outside our door, some went to the roof and some circled around us to frighten us.

I stood up with my younger sister beside my father, and the rest stood up beside my mother and our neighbour. My father welcomed them and asked them to sit down. One of the men answered that they wanted to take everything. I answered him back, and asked him why he wanted to take everything after taking away the most precious thing, which is our land. I said to him, "Why do you want to take more?" He answered me, "You'll see what we'll take more. I'll take you and your sister." My father begged him to take everything except his children. He was hit on his face, and he started bleeding. I couldn't stop myself from shouting at their faces, asking them why they were hitting an old man. I was hit and pushed severely to the ground. When I felt the pain, I hit the soldier back. They took the money we had — LL 40,000/- — and all our rings, even my father's wedding ring. One of them shouted and gave an order to take us inside the room. He ordered us to stand up by the wall with our hands raised above our heads, with our backs towards them. They ordered us not to look back. My sister Shadia who was one-and-a-half years old raised her hands and called her mother because she was afraid. They started shooting us. My baby sister was

shot in her head, and her brains splattered over us. My father was shot in his heart, but was still alive. My brothers Shadi, 3, Farid, 8, Bassam, 11, and my sisters Hajar, 7, and Shadia, and our neighbour died right away. My brothers Maher, 12, and Ismail, 9, were safe because they were hiding in the bathroom. My mother and my sister Nuhad, 16, were wounded, but did not die. As for me I was paralysed right away and I couldn't move. The soldiers thought that we were all dead and left our house.

I started screaming and asking who was still alive. My mother, my younger sister and my two brothers in the bathroom answered. Then my father answered, but he was mortally wounded. I asked them to escape and send somebody to rescue me and my father. So, they escaped and I was left with my wounded father, surrounded by the dead members of my family. It was a horrible situation that I'll never forget in my whole life.

At 10.00 a.m. three militia men came back to pick up the money they forgot, and they saw me approaching my father. They cursed me with very dirty words and told me: "See what we will do to you in front of your father." The three of them raped me, one after the other, in front of my father, shot me in my left hand, and went away. My father told me, "God be with you", and passed away. He couldn't bear what he saw, because at that time I hadn't menstruated yet, and what happened was horrible for me, especially as it happened in front of my wounded father.

They came back again on the same day, in the evening, and saw me having a drink. They were furious because they found me alive. They shot me twice and hit me over my head, and I fainted right away. Later during the night, I woke up hearing the noise of the cats that were roaming around the dead bodies. I tried, with my uninjured hand, to cover their bodies, but I didn't succeed completely.

The next morning, Saturday, the 18<sup>th</sup> September, they came back again, but I pretended to be dead.

On Sunday morning, a Lebanese soldier came to inquire about his relatives and our neighbours. I shouted for help, but I couldn't talk when I saw the soldier, who took off his jacket and covered my naked body. He took me with him. On my way out of the camp, I saw swollen corpses of those who had been slaughtered. I heard cries and moaning all the way. The soldier handed me to the Lebanese Red Cross, who at once gave me artificial respiration. They took me to a hospital, which refused

to admit me because I was a Palestinian. I was then taken to the American University Hospital. There were many reporters and journalists there, but I couldn't speak to anyone. I had lost my ability to speak.

I was taken to the emergency room and was operated on in order to extract the bullets from my body. I started to have continuous nervous breakdowns and hysterical attacks whenever I remembered what happened. My right hand was uninjured, so I asked the doctor for a paper and pen. I wrote one sentence asking about my family. Some journalists and reporters present in the hospital promised to find my family for me. A few days later, the doctor came and told me he had a surprise for me. It was my mother, whom I couldn't recognize, and I was sceptical if she really was my mother. I couldn't talk to her, but she started reminding me of things that proved to me that she was my mother. When my mother asked me about my father, whom she didn't know was already dead, I started screaming and had a nervous breakdown.

After finishing the treatment in the hospital, the doctor said that I should be taken abroad for further treatment, but they took me to Gaza Hospital, a hospital for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). At the door of the hospital I started screaming when I saw Lebanese soldiers. I was given a tranquillizer, and I woke up and found myself in bed. I couldn't bear the idea of seeing any military man or anyone, and I used to feel that everyone was coming to kill me. I continued having severe hysterical attacks.

The doctors told me that I'd be sent to Tripoli in northern Lebanon to be taken out from there to be treated abroad. My mother prepared my things for me, and I was taken by a Lebanese driver and a Lebanese bodyguard. I was lying in the back seat because I couldn't sit down. I had on a urine bag, an I.V. and a respiratory apparatus.

We drove along the coastal road towards Tripoli. We reached 'The Barbara Check-point', which was very famous during the Lebanese civil war. The driver asked me not to move and to pretend I was sleeping. The militia men at the check-point who belonged to the fascist Lebanese Forces ordered the driver and the bodyguard to step out of the car. They explained about me that I was being taken to be treated. The two militia said, "We know the girl", and looking at them I immediately recognized that they were in my house during the massacre.

The three of us were taken away in a Jeep with 'The Lebanese Phalange' written on it. They told me "now you will die", and they ordered the bodyguard to take off his clothes and sit on a bottle. Then they hit him on the head and he died immediately in front of my eyes.

Then they snatched away the urine bag and the I.V. They took away the blankets covering me. They raped me in front of the driver and put me naked on a rock at the beach in order to die. "Now she will die by herself", they said. I stayed the whole night in that situation, with the driver looking at me with pity. The next day the militia men came back and ordered the driver to take me back from where I had come. I was taken back to the hospital in Beirut in a much worse condition, unable to speak at all, refusing to see anybody and having continuous strong hysterical attacks.

For two years after that date I was unable to speak. I was in a wheelchair with all the suffering which I had to live with inside me. I was hospitalized for four years and underwent six operations. I have left Shatila now. I cannot stand to live in that same house in which half of my family was massacred. My mother rebuilt the house and now she and my brothers, Maher and Ismail and my sister Nuhad are living there. Slowly I started my life anew. I can walk now with the help of special shoes and a cane, and I am working in the Norwegian Aid workshop, making and selling handicraft items.

## AMINAH WAHBI (43 YEARS OLD)

I was born in Nahr al-Barid Refugee Camp in 1952. I got married when I was 25 years old to a man from Rashidiyya Camp. In 1979, we moved there for about two years. My first son Jalal was born that year. Life in Rashidiyya was good then. My husband was working, we had our own house and plenty of food. My second and youngest son, Bilal, was born in 1981, the year that changed our lives. The Israelis were invading Lebanon, starting from the south, and the Palestinian camps were their first targets.<sup>1</sup> We managed to escape unhurt and went to Beirut, but we lost everything else, for our house was destroyed. In Beirut we managed to rent a house in Sabra Camp, and my husband worked as a construction labourer. It was a hard life, but we fared better than most people.

I will never forget the massacre of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982. My husband was killed in that massacre. He was working near the Akka Hospital where he was apprehended and killed by the Kata'ib, Lebanese fascists. We all heard the shooting, not knowing what was really happening. Later on, I heard that four Kata'ib were at the hospital,<sup>2</sup> ordering people outside. The children were crying and everything was in chaos. The Kata'ib separated the Lebanese from the Palestinians. Then they asked the women how and which weapon to use for killing them. They took some people, including my husband. He was butchered and left to rot. Women and children were killed the same way on that day, soon after the Lebanese fascist leader Bashir Gemayel was killed on 14 September 1982. The Kata'ib said that the children must be killed, like Gemayel, and so they were.

I did not know about all of this then, because when I heard the shooting, I ran with my children to a place called Madina Riyadiyah, a sort of sports complex. We slept among the dead that night. I was worried for my husband, but I had to save the children. Bilal was only eight months old. The next day, leaving Bilal with a stranger, I went back to our place to search for my

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1. In July 1981, after fierce fighting between Israeli and PLO forces in Lebanon, including Israeli air raids on civilian areas of Beirut, an American diplomat negotiated a cease-fire on the Lebanon-Israel border, but nevertheless in June 1982 Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon, through to Beirut.
  2. But see Dr. Ang Swee Chai's, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (London: Grafton, 1989) 55, where she writes of Israeli troops invading Akka Hospital, shooting dead nurses, doctors and patients.

husband. The scene that awaited me was something I could never describe. Our house was totally destroyed. There were bodies everywhere. In my search I saw a bulldozer carrying masses of dead bodies scooped up like garbage, to be buried in one grave on a site between Shatila and Akka Hospital. I don't know how to describe my feelings when I saw one of the bodies was that of my husband.

I had lost everything. It felt like I had lost my own life too. I could not stay on in Beirut, with all the memories of the massacre. Three days later, I decided to go back to Nahr al-Barid and began looking for ways to get there. Travel was highly dangerous for Palestinians, and no taxi driver would take Palestinian passengers because they could be charged with abetting 'criminals' to escape. Any Palestinian captured by the Kata'ib during any journey would see the last days of his or her life. But I was desperate. And I was lucky. At the Cola station, a Lebanese man took pity on me and my two boys and asked us to join him in a taxi to the north.

I was afraid. I didn't know if I should trust the man, but I had no choice. As it turned out the man was indeed an angel sent to help me. He asked me to throw away all my personal documents, anything that said I was a Palestinian. He then asked someone to give me some clothing to hide my face. To foreigners, the Palestinians, Lebanese and even the Israelis look alike. We have similar features, but with distinct differences known only among us. That is why I needed to hide my face, and also because the written document and picture of the Lebanese man's wife were totally different from mine. Even the driver did not realize I was a Palestinian; otherwise he would not have agreed to take us.

We started our journey at 6.00 p.m., taking the road by the sea. It was still open to the public, but was eventually closed until recently when the civil war ended. On the way, we had to pass the Christian town of Jounieh. The people there hated Palestinians and Muslims in general. No Palestinian at that time would dare to go through that town, because many had been killed while doing so. I had to take off my head scarf to hide the fact that I am a Muslim. I have never been so afraid in my life as during that journey. But Alhamdulillah, we arrived safely in Tripoli, one-and-a-half hours later, and from there I continued on to Nahr al-Barid, which is only about 20 minutes away. The man who helped me took a great risk with his life, and I will never forget that. My sons are alive because of him. I am sorry I cannot

name him, which would jeopardize both he and his family. We still keep in touch.

I never go down to Beirut anymore, since the day I left after the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. My life is now in Nahr al-Barid with my two sons, no matter how bad it is. Once a year I visit my husband's family in Rashidiyya; that is about all the travelling I do. Jalal is now 16 years old, and is doing well in school. He is learning French in the hope that through the children's programme of Bait Atfal as-Samoud, he will be sponsored by the French government to help pay for his studies. Bilal, who is now 14, already has a sponsor, and he is also good in school. I hope my boys will be able to finish school and make something of themselves to help them escape the life their father and I had to endure.

## FAWZIYAH MAMDOH AHMAD (52 YEARS OLD)

I am an Egyptian who married a Palestinian and settled in Lebanon. When my husband died, our children were still small: Souma was only five, Ali, 4, Mohamed, 2, and Adnan was about nine months old. My husband was born in Haifa, Palestine, and in 1948 when he was nine years old, his family was forced to leave and they went to Jordan. His life there, as with all the other refugees, was terrible and they lived in poverty, waiting for handouts from people. In 1974, he came to Lebanon to find work, and he started off working as a porter at the Beirut docks on the night shift.

I was already a widow when I married Mamdoh, and I was 35 years old when I gave birth to Souma in Shatila Camp, where we lived after we married. Although we were poor and lived in a very small house, we were happy. Mamdoh had a family, which he had never had as a child, and a house he was very proud to own, and he felt his wandering days were over. He lived for his family now. The on and off war situation in Beirut made him restless again. He was afraid for all of us. During the Israeli invasion in 1982, he moved us out of Shatila until the situation became better during the cease-fire.

However on 12 September 1982, he refused to leave the house although we could hear active gunfire and bombing nearby. It was in the middle of the night, and from what we could tell, the bombing came from the direction of Madina Riyadiyah, not far from the camp. My husband asked me to take the children and leave, but he would stay and guard the house. I begged him to come with us, but he refused. So I had no choice but to go, because I was afraid for my children. I took the children to a place called Ayeshi Bakar Abu Chahla, in the UNESCO area, near Mar Elias Camp, and stayed there for about three days. On the last day, I could no longer contain myself and rushed out to Shatila to find out about my husband. The news about the massacre had reached me, and I was already in panic.

The sight that greeted me upon arriving at our house was one I will never forget. My husband was lying there on the ground butchered from the neck with half his face already gone, eaten by animals. I was so full of shock and grief that I went hysterical for a while. I asked someone in the area to give me a blanket to cover my husband's body, and then I made arrangements for his funeral. He was buried in the cemetery for the martyrs.

I had a severe nervous breakdown from that day, and for months afterwards I had difficulty sleeping. I could not bear to be near our house, which had been destroyed, much less could I live there. So, with only two blankets to call our own, for I could not salvage anything from the house, my children and I became homeless, living on people's sympathy, and sleeping on the streets and in the gardens. This went on for about a year, and it was the most frightening year of my life. After that I met a friend, and stayed with her for about three months.

It took a long time for me to recover from the shock of losing my husband and to think of the future of my children. When I did, I decided to go back to Shatila, rebuild the house, and start living there again. I knew I had to go to work in order to support my young children, but how could I when there was no one to care for them when I was away at work? There was no running water and no electricity, living conditions were terrible; but at least we had a roof over our heads. To my relief, Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS) found us and started to get our lives organized. My children had no papers because my husband did not register them as he came from Jordan. Therefore, my family was considered by UNRWA as 'non-registered refugees', not entitled to any aid. When BAS found us, they enrolled Souma and Ali at the UNRWA school, and Adnan and Mohamed were sent to the centre's kindergarten in the camp. They made every effort to have them registered as Palestinians. I was then free to go to work as a cleaning lady in other people's houses.

Then the camp war started in May 1985 and during one of the bombings, my house was destroyed. From then on our lives became a nightmare. We escaped from Shatila and found a spot in a crowded shelter, and there we stayed for nine months before taking refuge in the Chahla (Cola) area, in the basement of a house. We lived in that basement for about four or five years. As in Shatila, we had no water and no electricity. We had to use kerosene for cooking and to fetch water in jerry cans for our daily use. In winter it was cold, and in summer it was so hot in that hell-hole. At night in winter we would spread a blanket on the floor and huddle together so we could feel the warmth from one another's bodies. As the room was small, this was not hard to achieve. You cannot imagine how terrible it was.

I didn't neglect the children's education, but I had to put them in a private school near where we were living, and had to pay Lebanese Pounds 500/- just to put all of them in school. I

found jobs cleaning houses in the area, and when I went to work I just had to leave my children to fend for themselves before going to school. I received about LL 25/- a day for my work and the PLO gave us a monthly sum of LL 22,500/- after the death of my husband. I gave the children two and a half lire each as lunch money, enough for them to buy a sandwich with potatoes and *zait* (olive oil). I ate where I worked. Because of BAS' help, we were then entitled to receive help from UNRWA, so every month we received food rations, such as sugar, tea and flour.

One day I heard people saying that Gaza Hospital in the Sabra area had been abandoned and people were starting to move in and live there. I went there and found that almost all of the building was already full. I asked around if there was any more place to stay, and a man came to me and said there was one unit with two rooms that I could have if I paid him LL 100/-. I sold my earrings, the only jewellery left on me, for about LL 150/-, and I got this place. That was about five or six years ago, and we have been here ever since.

As you can see, the house is actually part of a ward or office of the hospital, which was boarded up to make separate units. Luckily there was a bathroom and space for a kitchen in our unit, but no door or windows. It is quite big and comfortable for all of us. At first, we put a blanket to cover the hole which was supposed to be the door. We use gas to light our house now. The children, who were all sponsored by BAS, were transferred from their school in Abu Shaker Street to the UNRWA school in the camp. However, upon reaching her first Intermediate, Souma decided to stop schooling. The children were finding it hard to concentrate on their studies after all that they had been through. Although they were good in their studies, they preferred to work than to go to school. Not long after, Ali and Mohamed followed in her footsteps. Now only Adnan is still in school and is still sponsored.

Souma learned how to sew in the centre and now she is sewing for money. Ali is training and working as a car painter and he hopes one day to open his own garage. Mohamed is doing the same job as Ali, and they each contribute LL 10,000/- to support the family.

All the suffering, pain and worries that I have been through have left me a sick woman. I have a slipped disc that bothers me continuously, and my diabetes has left me feeling tired and hopeless. I have to get medicine for my illnesses from Haifa hos-

pital in Bourj al-Barajneh camp. This costs much more than I can afford. Although I am not healthy now, I feel our life is getting better. We have a place of our own, there is water and electricity in the house, and the children are well and happy. That is all I hope for.

In the late 1940s, nearly 85 per cent of the Lebanese Shi'a were concentrated in two heartlands, one in the south in the area of Jebel Amel, and the other in the northeast region of Baalbak-Hermel. Not more than 10 per cent of the community lived in cities. The vast majority were peasants. Large estates accounted for three-quarters of the best lands in the Shi'a countryside. In 1948, the Shi'a were only 3.5 per cent of the population in Beirut. Until the mid-1950s Shi'a political representation was monopolized by six prominent landowning families, divided into rival factions which shifted between alliance with the opposition and support for the central power in Beirut.

By 1974, 40 per cent of the rural Shi'a population had migrated into the miserable suburbs of Beirut in search of work and better living conditions. From the south, thousands of sharecroppers and poor peasant families were uprooted by indebtedness and bankruptcy and forced to sell their properties. The Shi'a now became 63 per cent urban and more than 45 per cent of these urban-dwellers were centred in Beirut and its suburbs. The Shi'a community nationally had grown to 750,000, representing 30 per cent of Lebanon's population. The Shi'a class structure had changed. Returning wealthy migrants established new commercial networks and a Shi'a bourgeoisie emerged. There was a layer of middle-level salaried workers in the cities, an industrial proletariat in the suburbs of Beirut, and a community of migrant workers in the 'Arab oil-producing countries. And they now had an active and radicalized intelligentsia which began to question the distribution of power and resources in the Lebanese system.

Imam Musa al-Sadr's *Harakat al-Mahrumin*, Movement of the Dispossessed, was born in the early 1970s as an expression of the demographic and socio-economic shift of the Shi'a from the periphery towards the city-state of Beirut. This movement was also part of the general mobilization in the common

conflict during the 1970s. Initially, it took part in actions alongside the Lebanese left and the Palestinian resistance movement which in 1975 had provided the Shi'a with military training and arms.

In 1975, Imam al-Sadr said, "We began our movement ... because we believe in God and we know that the believer who is unconcerned with the fate of the dispossessed is an unbeliever and a liar". In February 1975, he prayed in the masjid of Kfar Shuba, a border village that had been half destroyed by the Israelis. He called on the villagers to return and defend themselves. He called for popular self-defence and created the military organization, Amal. "Anyone who doesn't know how to handle a weapon is straying from the teachings of our Imams, 'Ali and Hussein." In June 1975, he began a hunger strike in a Beirut masjid to protest the Civil War. "If the ruling class won't discharge its duty, we will build the future by ourselves." But in August 1978, Imam al-Sadr disappeared in Libya or *en route* to Rome, as the Libyans contend.

On 6 February 1984, the Shi'a rose in revolt in the heart of the capital of Beirut, affirming themselves as a force that would have to be included in any new arrangement of the Lebanese political system. The Shi'a gained access to government when Nabih Berri became Minister of Justice and Hussein Husseini became Speaker of Parliament.

The assault on the Palestinian camps which began 19 May 1985 grew out of Berri's bid to consolidate his role in a restructured Lebanese polity. In Tyre, Nabatiyya and other southern towns evacuated by the Israelis in late April, Amal took immediate control and set up rigorous check-points outside Palestinian camps like Rashidiyya and al-Buss. A *de facto* cease-fire between Amal and Israel ensued. Berri spoke of Amal's determination to prevent any reconsolidation of an armed Palestinian presence and denounced Arafat for "plot[ting] to foil Syria's plan to restore Lebanese unity". Amal's assault on the camps by 3,500 of its own fighters and 1,500 soldiers from the Lebanese Army's Sixth Brigade was resolutely denounced by Shi'a Maulana Fadlallah of Hizbullah.

## WAR OF THE CAMPS

**I**N May 1985, and intermittently through 1986 on into 1987, Nabih Berri's Amal militia made successive attempts to seize control of the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut's southern suburbs to eliminate PLO as an independent political and military force.

Those camps were inhabited mainly by Sunni Palestinians. The assault was spearheaded by the powerful T-54 tanks given Berri by President Assad of Syria, and followed an Amal assault on the Sixth of February Movement, a Lebanese Sunni militia formed to replace the Mourabitoun which, they claimed, was merely a front for the Palestinians. The presence of tanks around Sabra, Shatila and Bourj al-Barajneh, could not but remind Palestinians of the fall of Tal al-Za'atar in 1976. Although multiple cease-fire agreements stipulated the total Amal withdrawal from the area surrounding the camps, these are neighbourhoods inhabited mainly by Shi'a loyal to Amal and policed by the Lebanese army's predominantly Shi'a Sixth Brigade, also loyal to Berri.

The Amal assault on the Sunni Palestinian camps was part of a broader Amal-Shi'a<sup>3</sup> offensive against the Sunni community that had constituted West Beirut's leadership before the 1975-76 civil war. The Sunni Grand Mufti, Shaykh Hassan Khaled charged that Amal and gunmen were waging war against the Sunni community in West Beirut to coincide with the war against Palestinians in the camps. Large-scale looting in West Beirut's Sunni districts and bomb attacks against the cars and homes of prominent Sunnis promptly followed.

The testimonies that follow detail the suffering of the steadfast Palestinian camp population and the medical volunteers — from England to Malaysia — who tried to save some of their lives.

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3. Amal is only one 'wing' of the armed Shi'as; Hizbullah, predominantly Shi'a, was never involved in this anti-Sunni push.

## TESTIMONY OF A MALAYSIAN

IN May 1987, there was an appeal for medical volunteers on Malaysian TV and in the newspapers. The Trustee of Medical Aid for Palestinians,<sup>4</sup> also a founder of the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), Alijah Gordon, described the devastating conditions in the Beirut camps, the urgent need for medical volunteers, the shortage of medical supplies, the siege of the camps, wars, war injuries and illnesses, starvation and suffering.

Immediately, I decided I should go to Lebanon. Before my first interview, I tried to gather more information about the Palestinians and Palestine. I looked for Palestine on the map; I searched and scrutinized the small print throughout the Middle East, but I could not find the name Palestine; it had been obliterated by the Zionist-Israeli occupation of 1948!

I wasn't optimistic about being selected. After three or four long chats with Alijah Gordon, she told me to get myself packed. I should be ready at very short notice. I resigned from my job immediately. I felt I was very lucky indeed. Among several hundred applicants, only four volunteers were selected for the first team.

There was another big hurdle. We had to raise enough funds to cover our flight to Lebanon and war-zone insurance, which was awfully expensive. For several weeks, I was also involved in raising money. Alhamdulillah and thanks to the Malaysian public, we managed to board the plane on 8 July 1987.

It was a long and nervy journey to West Beirut despite the crash course we had been given on the Palestinian camps and Lebanon. Lebanon had been suffering civil war for 12 years. The airport had been badly bombed several times. The moment we stepped out from our plane, soldiers in various uniforms were everywhere, which was confusing. After stringent questioning by various officials, baggage opening and checking, and more questioning, we managed to leave the airport after a final check and questioning by soldiers at the door.

We were received by the co-ordinator from the Norwegian Aid Committee which was working closely with Medical Aid for

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4. Medical Aid for Palestinians began as a British charity founded by Penang-born Dr. Ang Swee Chai who witnessed the massacre at Sabra and Shatila Camps in 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Palestinians, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and the Lebanese government. All along the road to Beirut we were stopped at various check-points manned by uniformed soldiers: the Syrian army, the Lebanese armed forces, the Amal Militia, the Sixth Brigade, the traffic police. At first sight it was impossible to remember their uniforms to be able to identify the various forces, and the weapons in their hands did not make us feel welcome.

A thick layer of dust and red sand covered the ruins along the roadsides. We could see the destroyed stadium, with squatters living below, and at the bottom of collapsed flyovers lived more squatters. There were many deserted buildings covered with bomb-craters and bullet holes. The famous Holiday Inn still stood high, but miserably, near the seaside, supported only by its pillars.

There were no traffic rules in Beirut. None of the traffic-lights ever worked. Drivers manoeuvred their cars aggressively. There were many familiar models, like Volvo, BMW and Mercedes, but these cars had suffered a different fate from our cars at home. They had no headlights, no mirrors, windscreens or wipers. They were dented and old. As long as they had four wheels, they were allowed on the road.

We were driven to Bourj al-Barajneh camp in an ambulance. It had no windscreen, and the sides were peppered with bullet holes. One headlight was missing. It did not have a siren or equipment for first aid as you would expect in an ambulance. It was just a small van with a wooden bench at the back. A canvas stretcher, stained with mud and blood, lay on the floor. Hundreds of flies were busy feeding themselves on the dried blood. On the way, the ambulance fell into a big muddy pothole. We helped Dr. Ang to push it out from the hole. Covered with sweat and mud, we began our life in the Palestinian Camp of Bourj al-Barajneh.

Syrian soldiers manned the entrance to the camp. We spent almost an hour at the check-point unpacking our baggage onto the floor; every item was searched thoroughly with suspicion and curiosity. And much to our embarrassment a soldier picked up something from our baggage, waved it, shook it, bent it and sniffed it patiently, seeking for our answer as to what was this which was not supposed to be displayed in public. Sometimes they picked up something they admired and might ask to keep it. Usually newcomers obliged, being frightened and impatient to get the ordeal over in order to move on.

Bourj al-Barajneh is situated in the southern suburbs of West Beirut along the airport road. There were sandbanks covered with shrubs along the airport road erected to shield the camp from the view of motorists. The size of the camp was about one square kilometre. Seventy-five per cent of the camp houses had been practically destroyed. The houses were built in uneven zigzag patterns, with small alleyways in between, about two to three feet wide, to allow for passage. The population then was about 20,000.

On arrival inside the camp, many welcoming people came to greet us. They were warm, curious and inquisitive, and we felt very welcome. I was asked to work in the clinic, which was about five minutes' walk from the hospital. The camp was still under siege. The entire periphery was surrounded by the Amal militia, which was lodged in tall deserted buildings with their rocket launchers targeted at us. Even as we walked along the alleyways, we risked a sniper's bullet. Somehow, in this camp, overlooked by the Lebanese mountains, I felt very safe, safe because I was among Palestinians.

The camp was completely bereft of any form of modern civilization. There were no newspapers, telephones, motorbikes or cars. There was no recreation or entertainment. There was no school or playground for the children. The top two floors of the hospital had been heavily bombed and were covered with rubble. Medical equipment had been damaged by heavy shelling and bombardment. Medicines were scarce. Despite the damage to the hospital and to all the houses, no building materials were allowed to enter the camp for reconstruction.

Windows and chairs had been used as firewood for heating and cooking during the winter of 1986/87. All the residents were waiting optimistically for building materials to be allowed in to repair their houses. We waited the whole summer, and then came autumn. By October it started to rain heavily. Rain-water flooded the camp, about two to three feet high after half an hour's downpour. Plastic sheets were used to cover windows, bomb-craters on the roofs and leaking walls. Winter gets icy cold, between 14°C down to zero!

The clinic, named after the late Dr. Sami al-Khatib, was situated at the red line near the border among the residents' houses. It was just a little shack like that of our neighbours. The walls were covered with bullet holes and the roof had been hit by mortars. It leaked when it rained. There was no sophisticated

equipment, as in the clinics at home. There was intermittent war from May 1985. Though the camp was still under siege in July 1987, we tried to establish a 'new life' to make it as normal as possible. At the same time, we cautiously prepared ourselves for the outbreak of another round at anytime.

It was time to reorganize our work based on the needs of the residents, especially just after a war. We campaigned to vaccinate children. Hundreds of children had not been vaccinated, had no health charts, no birth dates, were underweight, undernourished and suffered from skin diseases and head lice, all the results of the war, living in unhealthy, unventilated, overcrowded underground shelters. Other common problems were the result of the environment, as well as gastric ulcers, high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney stones, stones in the bladder, nerve injuries, etc.

Susie Weighton, who had received an OBE from Queen Elizabeth for her service during the six months' war, returned to the camp to conduct a health survey. She left for England in November 1987 after completing her work. I had two Palestinians to assist me in the clinic. Both were translators, one a volunteer. By the time I left the clinic, they were both competent to carry out basic medical procedures. They could organize the clinic work, including administration, recording and stock-keeping, complete with a written report at the end of each month. I was ever so pleased and proud of them. They had the initiative and determination to learn. They worked with me, very often for forty-eight hours without proper rest and food, yet they never complained.

Between seeing patients, we would spread a thin mattress on the floor to catch some sleep. Most of the time they were careful to make sure I got enough rest and food so that I could carry on working. Neighbours and friends were always concerned that I should not over-exhaust myself. Their concern and sympathy were apparent. Even during bombing and heavy shelling, with rockets flying over every roof, they brought us food from whatever little they had saved up. The risk they took to bring us food really touched me, especially when they were elderly people. And nothing ever tasted so good as that food; though simple and a small amount to share among us, at that time it tasted better than the most expensive food from the menu of a posh restaurant.

My fear during a battle was not the rockets and bombs. Every day I feared the supplies in the clinic might run out. I feared there would not be sufficient medicines, bandages, equip-

ment, kerosene, candles, and so on. I had no choice but to economize. Bandages were washed and reused and washed again till they could not serve any purpose. We had to cut down a course of antibiotics from seven to three or four days. Patients with severe pain, who needed injections of analgesic, were given tablets only. We gave two Panadol tablets at a time and told the patients to come back should they need another two. We taught patients to clean their wounds with salt and water to cut down on the use of dressing materials. We even had to resort to alternate-day dressing to economize and reduce the large number of patients. But it was impossible for anyone to keep their wounds clean living in the dirty underground shelters.

Many times, due to thoughtlessness, I complained to patients that they were not keeping their dressing clean. 'You are supposed to keep your wound clean.' An apologetic smile in silence. 'Did you wash yourself before you came to the clinic?' An apologetic and embarrassed smile. 'We reserve the water for drinking and cooking only.' I regretted that before asking those stupid questions I hadn't noticed that she had been wearing the same clothes every day for the past six days.

After living in the camp for some time, one learned to differentiate between the sound of an ordinary gun, machine gun, hand-grenade, mortar, bomb or rocket and also to estimate its direction and distance.

There was no safe area in the clinic. If a 160-mm. mortar fell on our roof, the whole building would collapse to the ground. We left our lives in the hands of God. Whenever there was heavy shelling and bombing, we sat on the floor in between treating patients. The sounds and vibrations of bombs and rockets could easily perforate eardrums. They make ears ache terribly. They also caused severe pain at the back of the head. They often made me feel dizzy and sleepy. I would fall asleep on the floor if the shelling went on continuously for too many hours. Many times I was walked over by patients who rushed into the clinic in haste. It could get boring as well, if the shelling went on for six or seven hours or longer without a break.

Nurse Pok Looi, who came over in the second Malaysian team, and I would sing a song or two to counter the noise of the bomb explosions. She told me about the famous roast goose sold in Ipoh, her hometown. I thought about the tiger prawns and crabs in Kuching. We made tea over and over again, using a little camp stove, and drank it with lots of sugar to keep our energy and

spirits up. We discussed the possibility of another cease-fire. Sometimes we talked optimistically; if there was a cease-fire, we could go out to Beirut, to sit in a car, walk around Beirut, see the Mediterranean Sea and breathe the sea-air. Maybe sit in a café and watch people moving in the streets. We looked forward to visits from our Norwegian co-ordinator, to bring in medical supplies and news from outside. We looked forward to seeing anyone coming in from outside, but usually it was only a false hope. If he heard news of shelling on the camp, our co-ordinator would simply check the dead and injured list from some organization!

The first minute of a cease-fire, we would rush outside gasping for fresh air, though the air smelled terribly of gunpowder and the sky had turned hazy. Children started to run around in the alleyways playing again. Everybody longed for some movement after hiding indoors or in the shelters for a quarter of a day. I liked to go upstairs to check the damage: broken glass, fragments of bricks falling from the roof and walls, and pieces of shrapnel in various sizes.

Eagerly I would try my luck at connecting the electrical wire with one of the lines to check the supply of electricity, by joining the wire to several wires until it gave a spark. Hurrah ... now we could charge the battery, we could put on the autoclave, we could put on the water pump, we could run the fridge, and we could switch on the lights to see the wounds properly. Many times all these appliances overheated the wires, short-circuiting everything. Everybody seemed to be fantastic electricians, and eventually we also learned to do the job, connecting wires with our bare hands. Camp residents stole electricity from their fortunate Lebanese neighbours.

During such lulls, we would rush to get enough water; our priority, of course, was our patients. We went without washing ourselves, let alone our clothes, for days. We had to think of getting more medical supplies for the clinic. We had to visit the wounded or the very sick who were unable to go to the clinic during the shelling, or were too ill to walk.

The first time I heard a gunshot, I jumped and queried where it came from and from what type of gun. Two weeks after I arrived, I saw rockets being fired. It was a dark night, no electricity, and no moonlight. First there was this quivering explosion. We jumped out of bed, dashed to the door to see what was going on. Twenty-four Grad rockets flew across the camp, lighting up our houses hidden in the darkness.

Several nights later, I sat on our rooftop with some friends watching East and West Beirut shelling and bombing each other for five hours. There was a green line, about two kilometres from the camp, dividing the city. It was difficult to see friends getting injured or killed. There were times I saw a particular friend during the day or we met each other along the alleyway and the next moment, she was dead or injured. We lived in a very close community.

Often I was invited to eat with families. Palestinian hospitality would have a guest spend a night in their house. In a little room, we would sit on the floor to eat with our hands, usually by the dim light of a kerosene lamp or candle. After the food, we would drink sweet tea, cups and cups of tea, and we would talk about Palestine until everyone was tired. Then we would roll out the bedding, and I would squeeze among the womenfolk and go to sleep. Usually, I would leave messages with my neighbours regarding my whereabouts in case the sick or injured called at the clinic.

Professionally, doctors and nurses usually maintain a kind of distance in their relationship with patients. But this was awfully difficult in the camp. I used to get terribly upset seeing friends killed, taken prisoner or tortured.

Life seemed so short for the Palestinians. I would often walk up to a hill slope overlooking the airport road. Standing on the rubble, I would watch the traffic go by. Nobody seemed to slow down to take a look at what was behind those sandbanks. Nobody realized the living hell inside the camp. The suffering and injustice done to the Palestinians were shielded from the outside world by those sandbanks. If only other people could see what was going on in there! No matter how we screamed or shouted, nobody seemed to be interested or bothered to listen ... 'if only the outside world could see us', I often said to myself.

I had many little Palestinian friends as well. Many of these children had been orphaned, and they often sought attention and companionship from older people. They were a bunch of angels, although sometimes, like other children in the world, they could also be naughty. Palestinian children are born very, very strong human beings. Physically they develop and learn to do things much faster than our over-protected and pampered children. They make their own toys and invent their own games. They can also feed themselves at a very young age, unlike our

children who need to be coaxed for hours to eat. They would eat uncooked vegetables like the adults. I often admired them deeply and was amazed at their eating habits. Dr. Ang ever commented that she and I were typical examples of our spoiled children who refused to eat vegetables, the main cause of our small, underdeveloped physiques.

One early morning, a little girl, Nadia, about six years old, came to the clinic. She used to hide behind a pillar and whisper to me for a banana or a carrot. She was careful not to be caught asking for food. Otherwise she would get a slap on the back of her head.

She stood on her toes, elbows on the table and hands supporting her cheeks, and said, 'Ya Dolly, I am tired.' (The 'Arab way of describing being sick is *taban*, which also means tired). I put my hand on her forehead, it was boiling hot. 'Habibti — dear one — you have a fever', I said. After a thorough examination, I knew she needed a course of medicine taken at different times of the day. 'Nadia, where is your mother?' I needed to explain about the medicine.

'My mother is in prison.'

'Where is your father?'

'My father is dead.'

'Do you have a big brother?'

'My big brother is in prison as well.'

'Then Habibti, do you have a big sister?'

'Yes, my big sister told me to come here to get some medicine.'

'How old is your big sister?' I was thinking she should be briefed about Nadia's illness and her medicines.

'She is a bit taller than me.' She made a gesture with her hand above her head.

These little children often made a long evening shorter. We would sit together on my bed. They would teach me to sing and speak 'Arabic. Very often, they asked the same questions. 'Which is your country?' 'Malaysia.' 'Where is Malaysia?' 'Malaysia is in Southeast Asia.' 'Is Malaysia more beautiful than the camp?' 'Yes, Malaysia is beautiful.' How could I insult their little souls? 'My father always tells me Palestine is very beautiful, too', they all said, defensively.

In times of emergency, these little children were of great help, too. Usually on the way to collect water, they would come

to the clinic just for some conversation. When there was fighting, we used up a lot of gauze swabs and gauze packs, which we folded in between treating patients. The children would call in and say: 'We can help you to fold gauze, we promise to fold nicely'. They would put down their water cans, sit under the table and fold gauze over their laps. There wasn't ample room to sit when there was bombing or shelling. The safe areas are behind as many walls as possible, but, psychologically, sitting under a table is considered safe.

Many people, especially women and young children, were killed while collecting water, either shot by snipers or bombed to death. Water is the most important element to keep alive. People take risks, no matter how dangerous, to get water for drinking and cooking. Many a time I have heard women tell about their hidden fears when they went out to collect water at night. They would kiss their children goodnight and goodbye because they didn't know whether they would ever return.

Palestinian children in the camp are not as lucky as our children who have all sorts of toys. They play with rubble in the alleyways. They fight by throwing stones at each other's head, and stitching scalps was a common procedure in the clinic every day. Sometimes, they made guns out of the legs of broken chairs to play soldiers. Younger children liked to play with sand and rubble, making tombstones and play-acting funerals.

Engagements and weddings were regarded as important activities when friends and relatives gathered together. Everyone would put on their best clothes, and the ceremony was usually held on a rooftop. The couple would sit in front, and well-wishers would sit around them. The centre space was used for dancing. Somebody would beat the drum, and women and men would dance to the 'Arabic music. Towards the end of the ceremony, packets of pineapple juice — considered a luxury — would be distributed. If a person was lucky enough, there might be a biscuit to go with it. The young and the old would fight over the juice and biscuits. Before they parted, the women would kiss the bride on each cheek to congratulate her, and the men would kiss the bridegroom's cheeks to wish him well. 'Arabs do not kiss the opposite sex in public.

There was no school in the camp. In August last year, the Palestinians managed to open up temporary schools for the children from seven to twelve years old. They cleared the rubble from some of the bigger houses, painted part of the walls green,

and children sat on the floor to read and write. There was no education for children over twelve years old. However, schooling was often interrupted whenever there was an attack. There was no way for the children to receive a proper education.

In September last year, a group of volunteer teachers organized evening classes for teenagers who were unable to continue schooling or to go outside the camp for schooling. The classrooms were in the old factory which was badly bombed. About 200 children attended school in the morning and another 200 in the afternoon.

We started our class immediately after the children cleared the classrooms, because as it got dark, there was no electricity to provide light. We had to rely on sunlight. The students squinted their eyes trying hard to see what was written on the blackboard; as it grew darker, I would make my writing bigger until everyone said: 'Ya, Miss Dolly, we can't see anything'. With a candle, we might carry on discussing and answering questions. In the dark, mosquitoes and insects invaded the place. The students had to cope with the mosquitoes as well as pay attention to the lectures.

In winter, it got dark as early as four o' clock in the afternoon and, on top of that, water leaked from the bomb cracks when it rained. I taught health science. Since the residents had been physically attacked ever so often and their health facilities destroyed as well, it was vital to incorporate health education, first aid and basic life-support techniques in the syllabus. Unfortunately, this class had to stop as tension built up in the camp again.

Many new volunteers prepared themselves for the hard living and dirty environment in the camp by bringing clothes like jeans. After living in the camp for some time, we began to feel that we must make an effort to dress ourselves in suitable clothes, according to 'Arab tradition: to cover shoulders, necks and below our knees. It was a challenge within ourselves to make an effort to keep up our appearance despite the shortage of water, the lack of electricity, and with the mud and sand. We had to struggle to create a normal life in order to resist the misery and suppression.

Eventually, we learned from the Palestinians; they had nothing except their own bodies and their pride. Pride, dignity, strength to resist, and determination to survive, have kept them alive. We, as foreigners from comfortable homes, had a lot to learn from them.

However, the moment I stepped out of the camp, though in my best clothes, I felt I was the odd one out in the crowd. My clothes were muddy yellow, stained by unclean water. I scratched, because my body itched and my shoes were often covered with mud.

Despite the fact that the infrastructure of Lebanon had been destroyed due to the twelve-year-old civil war, life went on as usual in Beirut. About a hundred metres beyond the camp was a busy street with shops selling all sorts of goods. Fresh fruits and vegetables were sold in the stalls at market prices. People moved around in the street, but somehow nobody seemed to know the kind of life and the environment in which the Palestinians were living, just beyond the street.

When Malaysians come home at night, we have a roof over our heads. When we put down our heads on the pillow to sleep, we call it home. The Palestinians have been deprived of their homes, their homeland, their personal rights and the right to live. They have been living as guests in a host country for forty years.

We all have our own self-pity, discontent in our lives, but our sorrow cannot be weighed against what the Palestinians have endured. Every family shares the misery of losing one or more family members killed in a war or at different periods. Those who survive carry on living with dignity and pride, protecting the rest of the family, turning the impossible into the possible. There is always hope for a better tomorrow; life goes on. Young people get married, more babies are born.

Many people have asked me if I am religious. My family members have their free choice of faith: some are Buddhists, some are Christians. I do not attach myself strongly to any particular religion, but I believe in a God who can protect and guard us.<sup>5</sup> Whatever it is, I believe, one need not have a particular religion or be a strong believer to work for the Palestinians.

Palestinians in the camp are mostly Muslims. Every Ramadan, the fasting month, the camp has been attacked. They named these attacks 'the Ramadan war of 85', 'the Ramadan war of 86', then the third which lasted for six months between 86 and 87, and the recent war of 88.

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5. Dolly Fong later converted to Islam and is now known as 'Aliyah.

During Ramadan, I thought about home, the shopping centres, the decorations, the shoppers and all sorts of cakes. In the camp, I was invited to break fast with several families in the evenings. I enjoyed the atmosphere, being treated as one of the family, which made me feel very much at home. As usual, there was not enough food to share among the children. Therefore, I always ended up coming back to the clinic to eat *hommous* (crushed *kacang putih*) and *khobiz* ('Arab bread').

During my one year in the camp I cried once, it was because of the Palestinians, and I prayed once, it was for the Palestinians ... why can't the outside world put a stop to these sufferings, why can't the Palestinians live like the rest of the people in the world ... let the children grow ... let the adults live ... let the old have some peaceful days to remember this world ... .

The majority of the camp residents came from Galilee in Palestine. They were peasants or farmers living in tranquil farm-houses. The older generation often speak about their childhood in Palestine, the strawberries they used to grow, the green vegetables, and the world-famous Jaffa oranges. When they were expelled in 1948 by the Zionist Israelis, many Palestinians thought it would only be for a short while. Until today, some of them still possess the keys to their houses in their villages of Palestine, although their villages have mostly been destroyed and replaced by Jewish settlements. When they arrived in Lebanon they lived in tents, some for twenty years. In winter, the tents were easily blown or washed away by the heavy rain and strong gales.

The Palestinians are fantastic homemakers; after living in tents for twenty years, the Lebanese government eventually allowed them to build their own houses on the land bought by the United Nations. Brick by brick, with their hands, they built themselves houses, extending the size gradually, whenever they could afford it, in order to accommodate the growing number of children. However, their lives have never been smooth. They have been attacked, and their houses have repeatedly been destroyed; before they could reconstruct their homes, they were destroyed, again and again.

Life in the camp has been a challenge to the residents, to resist the external forces, the suppression; their daily concern has been how to find food, how to wash their clothes, how to bathe, how to sleep, how to clothe themselves, how to keep warm, how to smoke, all with the common goal of survival. Having skills

and strength to sustain the bullets and bombs were not adequate to survive the camp life.

In March this year, a delegation consisting of architects and engineers managed to come into the camp to conduct a survey of the houses, the hospital and the masjid, to gather statistics on what was damaged and ruined. A census was conducted to determine the number of houses remaining. At that time, 75 per cent of the camp houses had been destroyed, and those remaining were in uninhabitable condition. Corrugated iron and plastic sheets, weighed down by stones to stop them from being blown away, formed many roofs; flattened rusty tin, secured with wire, covered windows.

Members of the delegation painted numbers with a big brush on the wall of each house, or merely on something remaining on the ground. Each house was given a number. My clinic number was 1098, written in red paint. I thought about our postal services at home. I told our co-ordinator if he was too busy to visit me, he could write me a letter with this number on it, addressed to Bourj al-Barajneh Camp!

Many people were unfortunate. There were no remains at all on which to write a number. They took the delegates to an empty area. They pointed out to the delegates: 'This is my space ... I built this house with my own hands and sweat, there is nothing left now.' To convince the delegates, the old man continued: 'Twelve of us, my father and mother, slept with our heads in the tents, our feet in the rain, ... here, ... like this ...'

Palestine ceased to exist in 1948. Palestine lost its name. Palestine lost its territory. Forty years ago, this is how the Zionists came to Palestine; 'Thousands of people were killed. It was frightening. We were disorganized, leaderless. We carried our young children, a bundle of bedding, and our house key. We walked to the Lebanese border. After several weeks of waiting to return home, we became desperate for food and water. We walked to Tyre, others to Saida, in South Lebanon. Eventually, we came to Beirut, since there was not yet the possibility to go back to Palestine.'

With misery, homelessness, the humiliation which it entailed and continues to entail, they live in exile. The older generation has passed, another generation has come. The Palestinian men describe their lives with such desperation that nobody can ever forget: 'We are homeless, we are stateless, we don't belong anywhere'. 'We have no jobs, no education, no skills, we have to rely

on charity ... whereas we had our houses surrounded by fruit trees in Palestine.'

'We would rather go to prison than live in the camp. At least in prison, after some torture, they leave you alone. Here, we have to safeguard our lives every day.' 'The soil of the camp is soaked with the blood of our brothers and sisters. We are not wanted in this country. Why? Is our blood not the same as theirs? Is our blood cheaper than water?'

Being Palestinian means they don't have a passport of their own country. Wherever they live, they are considered aliens, they have lost their nationality. They are called refugees. The longer they live in exile, the more intense is their search for their own identity. The Palestinians observe their culture carefully, from one generation to another, wherever they go. The Palestinian children are taught intensely about their country, their village, their culture and most important of all, the history of their exile.

Rabiah is a handsome fourteen-year-old boy. My mother had a favourite expression: 'If he were lucky, he would still be sucking his mother's breast'. His right leg was injured last year in the war, and he walks with a limp. He came for dressing every day; before his wounds could heal, he was injured again, every time with multiple shrapnel, though not severely. Looking at him, I couldn't help verbalizing negative thoughts: 'You need to be more careful ... you should take some rest at least for several days before you run around with that gun again.' Expressionless, as I cleaned the wounds on his face, neck and back, he replied: 'My father has been killed, so also my brothers. I can't see my mother die ... my sister is only ten years old.' I didn't know how to find an appropriate answer. He continued, 'I will fight until I die, till my last drop of blood'. Because Rabiah is a Palestinian.

Being Palestinian, they have to carry identity cards stating they are refugees. With that card, they are always standing in queues: long lines of women, queuing up for a few kilos of rice and flour. Their faces worn and vacant, with sunken eyes and dirty feet, they look much older than their age, exhausted by years of carrying water, heavy loads on their heads, bearing children, scrubbing the mud and sand from their houses.

These Palestinian women may only play supporting roles to their husbands, but they are the toughest women I have ever seen. They take care of their homes, their children; they are fantastic housewives. They are domesticated, they are physically

strong, but they are very feminine women. And they are capable of carrying guns if they need to.

Many Palestinian women are widowed at a very young age, some as early as seventeen or eighteen, usually with a young baby who has never seen his father. 'Marriage is only good when there is no fighting', my friend, a nurse of about twenty years old with a six-month-old baby boy, often told me. 'So many men die in every war, next it could be my husband.'

There are about 17,000 Palestinian orphans in Lebanon. Our Prime Minister sponsored a nine-year-old boy called Bilal Yacob from Bourj al-Barajneh Camp. When he was two years old, in 1981, his father was injured during an exchange of fire between East and West Beirut, with the result that his leg was amputated. At the age of two, Bilal had great sympathy for his father's misfortune: he wanted to give his father his own leg. In 1986, a huge bomb hit Bilal's house, and his father was killed. His mother suffered severe injuries to her body. For some time, Malaysia and Bilal Yacob had been the main topic of daily conversation. I often heard the remark from the camp residents whenever I walked past: 'Malaysia is beautiful, Malaysia stands with us'.

The children in the camp are fearless. They are born into this world with bullets and bombs to welcome them. The faces of their mothers could be their sole consolation; their fathers — not infrequently — would have been killed before they were born.

One day I was walking along the border of the camp to visit a new-born baby. A series of gunshots went off, it sounded very close. I halted to look around, leaning against the wall; fragments of bricks fell down, I hesitated. But I thought about the baby, the first child of this young couple, he has a long future ahead of him, he has to grow to become an adult, I had to see this child.

Whenever there was an attack on the camp, the first explosion of a bomb or rocket would frighten all the women sitting along the alleyways. They would rush to gather their children, like mother hens searching for their chicks. The same goes for us in the clinic, getting things ready to receive emergency cases.

Ibrahim is a very cute four-year-old boy, with a round chubby face, like Asian babies. He talks a lot with slurred speech and likes to argue with bigger boys. During one of the bombardments, when everybody was running home for safety, Ibrahim was among the children. Instead of going home, he sat behind the sandbags barricading my clinic door. 'Go home, Ibrahim', I

screamed. He looked at me with the cutest smiling face I have ever seen: '*Kumblih wahdih bas*', meaning 'just one hand-grenade only!'

The residents in the camp have a high tolerance for pain, not because they are different, not because they are Palestinian. Invariably the hospital is short of medical supplies. Suturing of lacerations was often done without local anaesthesia. They have to endure the pain of having needles poked into their skin and flesh. This could be the main reason why everyone is so frightened of needles.

Ibrahim didn't fight, but he was always falling over. One evening his little friends were struggling to carry him to see me. He was covered with blood all over his face, and his shirt was soaked with blood. He had a cut on his forehead about 1½ cm. deep and 4 cm. long. The X-ray machine in the hospital was damaged and the hospital was closed. I couldn't send him for a skull X-ray, neither could I refer him to the expertise of a doctor.

His little friends helped to shine the torch while I cleaned his wound, some holding his hands and some holding his legs, to calm him down. 'Does he need an *ibri* (needle)?', the excited children asked. 'No, Ibrahim must close his eyes, try to sleep.' I left him in the care of his friends while they watched me quietly preparing the suturing set, burned with a drop of alcohol to sterilize. 'No needle, Ibrahim, sleep', they consoled Ibrahim.

He lay still. He didn't struggle. I put a bandage over the sutures to stop the bleeding. I took him home to advise his mother to give him the antibiotic syrup. The whole night I had negative thoughts about Ibrahim's wound. I might have left some foreign bodies in the wound, he might get an infection, he might get meningitis.

Early the next morning, I was woken up by a familiar voice: '*in ... inti niami hon?*', you are sleeping here? God, I thought, I was working till 4 o'clock this morning. A little face was peeping through the window, it was Ibrahim. Alhamdulillah, he was okay. I went back to sleep, it was only 6.30 a.m.

The second day, he was wrestling with some children, rolling on the ground, on the mud and stones and excrement, without the bandage. I was still worried about Ibrahim. As long as I knew he was still playing, he had no problem. On the fifth day, I called him into the clinic to remove his stitches. There was nothing on his forehead. 'My father cut the stitches this morning.'

All the medical volunteers from various countries worked under the sanction of the Norwegian Aid Committee. The coordinator of the Committee in Lebanon had the authority to dismiss any volunteer regardless of his nationality if he thought he was unsuitable or misbehaved himself.

We volunteers under Malaysian Medical Aid for Palestinians could not function under this name, as it was considered racist! The Palestinians were guests ... regarded by the Lebanese as refugees living in their country. Therefore, the name 'Medical Aid for Palestinians' was never mentioned to anyone once we were outside the camp. Generally, the Lebanese blamed the Palestinians for bringing them mishaps and suffering. Wherever the Palestinians go, the Zionists follow. Some Lebanese stood with the Palestinians to defend and protect themselves against a common enemy.

Never, ever, would a Palestinian in their hospital tell you what to do as a newcomer. They envied any foreigner because the foreigners were a different species of human beings. They create illusions of the paradise of countries other than the camp, far from the humiliation, indignity, threats, poverty, imprisonment, and torture. If a volunteer carried an attitude that 'I am here to save your life, I am here to help you', he could be sure of getting awfully disappointed and rejected as well.

We can't blame the Palestinians for being suspicious towards new volunteers, especially in a big camp. Could he be associated with the Zionists, maybe the CIA? Generally, the Palestinian masses welcomed our presence, but it might take them some time to gain confidence in a new volunteer. They would critically compare you with a previous volunteer. A volunteer had to prove herself in her work. Once they trusted you, you were stuck!

We couldn't live in a world of our own in the camp. In order to adapt we had to integrate with the people, observe their culture and traditional habits. Turning down an invitation for tea or coffee was considered as unfriendly, snobbishness. It's a serious offence in the camp!

The Palestinians had no understanding of privacy, sense of time, rest, or tiredness. Twenty thousand living in an area of one square kilometre, without occupation, work, access to the world outside the camp. They were always full of energy, invariably they did not understand that we could feel tired and needed to rest.

Children and young girls liked to call on us at any time, even late at night. Women would bring their children, often with a cough or runny nose. Visitors would invite themselves into our living quarters, look into every corner; pick up things from the table; ask personal questions, ask to see photographs of our family; sit on our beds uninvited. Eventually, we lost the sense of privacy, even the sense of having belongings. There was no time for ourselves, nothing ever belonged to us any more.

Though volunteers are made aware of the risks and danger, the Norwegian co-ordinator would seek our opinion on whether we wished to evacuate or to stay on when there was heightened danger. We were twice asked to evacuate. First, at the beginning of October 1987 and the second time in May 1988. Our co-ordinator had to be convinced it was of our own free will to stay on in times of greater danger.

It was difficult to convince our co-ordinator in May this year not to evacuate. The hospital was closed. All the Palestinian Red Crescent Society medical personnel had fled the camp. It is immoral to abandon thousands of people, and it defeats our purpose of working in the camp. Furthermore, UNRWA — the UN Relief and Works Agency — ceased working in the camp in dangerous times like these.

On both occasions, many Palestinians warned us to leave the camp. Having suffered enough over the years, they reckoned our lives were more valuable than theirs: 'Leave the camp now, we like you very much, we don't want to see you die here.' I felt a lump in my throat. Thousands of Israeli troops were invading the Lebanese border in the southeast; there were air raids on the Shouf Mountains outside Beirut; the rival Shi'a factions were bombing and shelling each other along the periphery of the camp; fifty rockets were fired into the camp at five-minute intervals; thousands of people were fleeing the camp; those who stayed had nowhere else to go, or refused to go.

Fleeing the camp for safety meant separation of the family. Parents had to bear the pain of sending some children outside the camp, some to another house with relatives, and some to remain in their own house. It was a precaution to preserve the family line. If a bomb hit their house, at least there would still be some members alive elsewhere, in another house.

Many people have asked me since my return if it is safe to work in the camp. My answer is: 'It is safe until you get killed'. There is no difference between being a Malaysian and a

Palestinian as far as safety is concerned. Being a Malaysian or any other nationality does not make anyone an exception.

Some volunteers do get disappointed when they arrive at a Palestinian camp. They could have been misled or wrongly informed and have had the impression that the Palestinians are a bunch of angels walking around with arms over each other's shoulders. Palestinians are the same as any other people in the world. Each Palestinian has a mind of his own. Each has his own views and expectations, each has an opinion, his own belief in politics. They have different political parties, too. Everybody has a free choice to believe in what he thinks is best for him. They are politically very conscious, but they also suffer from a dilemma concerning their future, trapped as they are in an enclosed world. They are argumentative, forever searching for the right solution. Until they find it, find their way to return, we Malaysians, on whom God has showered His bounty, can only do our utmost to support them.

Dolly Fong writing from Kuching.

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Ed. Note: We must clarify that the conflict with Amal ended formally in December 1987 after the outbreak of the *Intifadah* in Palestine. There was further fighting in early 1988 but this was an 'internal war' between rival factions of Fatah with the dissidents backed up by the Syrians. The Syrian Army placed check-points around both Bourj al-Barajneh and Shatila camps and prevented repairs to houses, etc.

THE THIRD SIEGE OF BOURJ AL-BARAJNEH CAMP:  
A WOMAN'S TESTIMONY<sup>6</sup>

*The testimony which follows is from one of a series of sieges of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. This siege of Bourj al-Barajneh began on 4 November 1986. The testimony is from RZ, a social assistant with Najdeh Association,<sup>7</sup> who lived and worked in Bourj al-Barajneh. At that time, she was married with four children under nine years of age. She stayed through the siege until 22 February 1987, when she left to seek medical care for her children. She was interviewed and her account recorded on 5 March.*

ON the morning of the first day of the battle, 4 November 1986, I was on the street and saw Amal [a Lebanese Shi'a] militia gathering. Two or three days before, they had begun throwing explosives into the camp, and it looked as if something was about to start. So I returned to the camp and asked a friend to keep an eye on my children while I did some case work. While I was filling out a questionnaire, a shot rang out. News came that a young man from the camp had been sniped at and killed. I ran home, and while I was running the shelling started. I found my children at home, and put them in the safest part of the house. Of course, the first thing I did was to go and buy provisions, on the basis that the battle would last a month at most. But the fighting became more violent each day and, with deaths mounting on both sides, there was no scope for a solution. Of course, it was planned to be like this.

We stayed in our home for a long time, but then it got hit by a rocket. The children were very frightened so we went down into the shelter. We stayed there for a week. Then it rained heavily and the shelter flooded. The children were swimming in water. It was wet, dirty ... . So we got ourselves together and returned home.

*A sister whose home was on the khatt al-tamas, the 'hot line', came with her children to stay with R. A neighbour*

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6. This is a slightly edited version of a testimony taken by Rosemary Sayigh and first published in *Race & Class*, XXIX, 1 (1987) 25–34.

7. Najdeh is a Lebanese co-operative, involving both Palestinians and Lebanese, which organizes vocational training and social welfare, and aims to help people become self-sufficient.

*whose home had only one storey, and was therefore less protected, also used to shelter in R's two-storey home during the shelling.*

The first two months were bearable. There was food, there was water, people could take it. Of course, many were killed. But we had got used to the shelling, we had got used to death. My cousin (*ibn khal*) was killed and buried without his family even seeing him. It became something usual.

At the beginning of the siege, people ate well, we used to eat three times a day, as usual. When the first month ended, we began to eat only twice a day. If we had known how long the siege would last we would have eaten only one meal a day from the beginning, so as not to be completely cut off later. The last<sup>8</sup> month of the siege was the period of hunger. Of course, some of the organizations helped people, but in the end they had fighters who had to eat. There were a few hundred kilos of foodstuffs with the Popular Committee: *burraghul*, lentils, *hommous*, beans, rice, tins, no flour ...<sup>9</sup> But it wasn't enough. They distributed food once; it wasn't really a distribution, people paid with money, not the whole price, but something symbolic. There were no food supplies other than what people had stored in their houses.

*The stocks of families with many children finished before those with few. The families of martyrs, on small fixed allowances, were also hard hit. R describes her own household's food situation, forms of redistribution, and dramas of the 'month of starvation'.*

Food began to be very scarce in the third month. There wasn't anything left. We ate *melloukhia*<sup>10</sup> without anything, just water. Once I went to one of the political offices and asked for a tin of *foul*.<sup>11</sup> I put it in a saucepan of water, and that was our meal for the day. We were hardly having one meal a day at that stage. Sometimes not even one meal.

Sugar was finished, so we drank tea without sugar. We made tea and joked with the children, "Come and have supper". My

8. At the time of the interview the siege had not ended. R refers to the month from mid-January to 20 February, when she left the camp.

9. *Burraghul* is a form of wheat, roasted and crushed; *hommous* is chickpeas.

10. *Melloukhia* is a kind of green which is dried and used to make soup or stew.

11. *Foul* are fava beans.

little daughter of ten months kept saying, "*Bidi ibsi, bidi ibsi*". I felt like crying. Where could I get her bread? Very few people still had bread.

Once when we had been two days without a meal, my children were crying, they wanted to eat. I had no food left; my father-in-law's house also had no food. So I decided to go to my mother, she had only my father to cook for, and you know how old people store bags of food. Her home was far away and I was afraid of the shelling, but I was obliged to go because my children were crying. So I went and brought a dish of *shishbarak*<sup>12</sup> from her. How happy and pleased the children were! I opened the door and sat feeding them. Then a child came and stood there and said, "Auntie, will you give me something to eat?" I told him that I'd got just enough to feed my own children. He stood there by the wall, crying. So I told him, "Come, you are like my children", and I put some food on his plate. My children cried out that they hadn't had enough, but I told them, "The important thing is that you've got something in your stomachs".

At night, they would knock on our door, small children, even adults, for example, people who had someone wounded in hospital. The wounded needed good food, vitamins, to help them recover. But, at the end, the hospital was giving only one small meal a day, without bread. People were obliged to knock on doors, "My son is wounded. If you have *anything* ...".

There were families that didn't have a father; they depended on monthly allowances that hardly covered the cost of bread. People all felt for each other, they wanted to help others, but when there was nothing left, no one could help anyone any more. Once a young man came to me and said, "You, as a member of Najdeh, should help me". He wanted sugar. I told him, "By God, I haven't got sugar for my own children. But wait here" — his leg was amputated — "and I'll bring you some sugar". I went to my mother and told her that I wanted sugar for my children. Of course, she gave me some, half a kilo, or a kilo. I brought it and gave it to him.

Once a woman came at night and knocked on the door. I used to leave the door open at night so that if someone was passing, and there was shelling, they could take shelter. She told me, "My young brother is wounded and he's crying, he can't

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12. *Shishbarak* is a kind of pasta stuffed with minced meat and cooked in yoghurt.

sleep, he is hungry. Have you something to give us?" I had saved a slice of bread to give my eldest son in the morning; he never kept quiet, he was hungry all the time. So I told her that I hadn't any bread. She turned to go away. I told her, "Wait!" and I gave her the bread with some *za'atar*;<sup>13</sup> *za'atar* stayed with me until the end, we used to eat it without bread. She was so happy to take it to her wounded brother, so that he would sleep that night.

It is true that people ate cats. My children killed a cat and ate it. We had been some days without cooked food when my son smelled roasting meat. I told him that it was cat meat, but he said, "I don't care. I want to eat cat." So I told him to go ahead and catch a cat. He caught one, and I killed it and cooked it for him. Not everybody ate cats, but the majority did, especially the young men. People also ate dogs and mules. I didn't see people eat rats, but Dr. Ben says he saw children getting a rat out of a sewage pipe and cutting off its head to eat it.

There's a martyr's family, very poor, they got hold of a tin of sardines four years past its expiry date. The whole family ate from it, without bread. All were poisoned and had to be taken to hospital. A short while after they were taken again to hospital suffering from hunger. They had nothing. There were many families like that.

In the last period, people were going out to the cemetery, there's grass and weeds growing there. They picked grass, boiled it, put salt on it and ate it. And many women were sniped at while picking grass. There is no shelter there at all.

*Though food shortage was the more dramatic, the lack of water and fuel also caused serious problems.*

Water went on coming to us for about two and a half months; there was still diesel oil to work the pumps. When *mazout* gave out, they siphoned off a few hundred litres from a petrol station near the camp. They gave most of it to the hospital, and some for pumping water, but it only lasted two days. There was no water for washing. We used to wait for rain to be able to wash our clothes. We had to go on wearing the same clothes even if they were like tar. When it rained we would say, "The water has come!"

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13. *Za'atar* is dried thyme.

If we wanted water badly, we had to get it from the bases at the front line. A person might go to fetch a gallon of water, perhaps he would return, perhaps he wouldn't. There was a woman with five children — they had no father — she went to get water and was sniped at and killed there. Her children were left homeless. Many people were killed at the water place.

*As a result of the cutting off of water, skin diseases and parasites spread, especially in the shelters due to overcrowding, but also in homes. R said her children could not sleep at nights for scratching themselves. She developed head boils.*

After a while, *ghaz* (liquid gas) and *kaz* (gasoline) also finished. We broke up the doors and windows of our houses for firewood. That's how my two-year-old son burnt his neck, falling on firewood. Then, wood became scarce and people had to go to the 'hot line', the no-man's-land between them and us. We had to creep out at night to be able to bring it in.

At the end, the hospital only worked the generator if they had operations. You found the wounded using motor oil or *ghaz*, where there was any, for light even though motor oil makes dirt and smoke.

*R did not focus on the military aspect of the siege, but details she gave in passing have been gathered in the following section.*

As to the arms they used to hit the camp, they used every kind: tanks, rockets, mortars — often all at the same time — as well as guns mounted on military vehicles. They even used 160-mm. shells that make a big crater and can pierce two floors of a house. They used the Murr Tower from which to launch rockets.

Amal had bases all 'round the camp, behind the Airport Road, at the Hill of Sand, Ghazzar, the Masjid of the Prophet, in the Amaliyeh, in Villa Meshnouk. They could snipe from there because it is high and overlooks the whole camp.

There was a heavy concentration of fire on the hospital, and on the masjid at prayer time. They had fortified the hospital before the siege, made a cover of sandbags. But the work hadn't been finished; the side that faced towards Villa Meshnouk was open, so Amal concentrated its fire on that side. The hospital building had become shaky through so much bombardment.

Casualties were high: about 130 deaths,<sup>14</sup> of whom a high proportion were women and children; and around 2,000 wounded.<sup>15</sup> Everyone helped to carry the wounded to hospital because it is at one end of the camp. Anyone who was close when someone got wounded would rise and carry the wounded to hospital. Of course, at times there was no way to move the wounded. If you moved them, it was possible that you would get hit. So you had to wait for a quiet spell. When I wanted to visit the hospital, I had to cut it to half a second, running, before the next missile fell. We reckoned that between one shell and the next would be ten minutes. But sometimes they came down like rain. Bombardment was often heavier at night so that people wouldn't have any rest.

*With many houses uninhabitable because of their closeness to the 'hot line', and with damage to houses increasing, the pressure on shelter space intensified. There were not enough shelters for all the population.*

There was a big pressure on the shelters. Probably this is what made sickness spread, pressure, no space, people on top of each other, no water ... . Some quarters were deprived of shelters. For example, Tarshiha only had one shelter and it was constantly under sniper fire. There were nearly 20,000 people in Bourj, but there were only seventeen shelters, the largest of which could hold only 300 people, so not even a quarter of the people could find shelter!

*R gave detailed descriptions of two of the ugliest incidents of this siege, the 'missile massacres' carried out during cease-fires.*

They would declare a cease-fire and then suddenly shell the camp, so as to cause the greatest possible number of losses. One missile fell on seventeen children, killing five immediately and wounding the rest. It was right at the beginning. There was a cease-fire and people were even leaving and entering the camp. It was the day of the funeral of the young man who was killed on the first day of the siege. So the women all left their children to go to the funeral, because this young man was his mother's only son and everyone wanted to condole with her. And they felt

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14. Up to 5 March.

15. At 16 March, 300 to 400 people were reported to be seriously wounded in Bourj.

secure because there was a cease-fire and there was no shelling. The children were clustered together under a water-tank, and a woman was baking *mena'eesh*<sup>16</sup> and feeding them. It came down, the first missile. Every young man carried two children, and brought them under the shelling to hospital. My house was in front of the hospital, all the wounded came past it.

Another missile cut off the legs of seven young men, both legs. And five or six were killed outright. This was in a later period. There was a cease-fire and the sun was out. People came out and sat in front of their homes, sunning themselves and catching their breath. Then suddenly, a shell fell among them. They carried them on stretchers in front of our house, and someone was carrying their legs ... . The hospital couldn't keep up with the operations. It was a massacre. People were carrying legs, a head ... . Among them was a child of ten, his two legs gone, one of his brothers and their father both lost two legs. The father died the next day. As soon as he saw his children with their legs cut off, he had a heart attack and died.

On that day, people wanted to carry the legs and storm out of the camp. "If they want to kill us, let them kill us. But we have to show what they are doing to us."

*Another incident that greatly affected the people of Bourj was an attempt by four young Palestinians to get a lorry load of food into the camp, one day in February.*

They got through all the check-points and reached the entry of the camp, in front of the Amaliyeh. But Amal discovered them and hit the lorry with a shell, burning it and killing the young men. People all wept when they knew that four young men died for their sakes. Amal propaganda said that the lorry was full of whisky and hasheesh. How could anyone believe that? How could they kill people trying to bring in food?

In the last period, people began to get desperate, to despair. There was talk about what to do. "We will not surrender. There would be another Tal al-Za'atar.<sup>17</sup> We must carry out an operation

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16. *Mena'eesh* are mounds of bread covered with *za'atar* and oil and baked in a public oven.

17. The siege of Tal al-Za'atar by the right-wing 'Christian' Phalange began in 1975 and ended on 13 August 1976 with the massacre of the Palestinians when the people, bereft of food, water and medicines tried to leave the camp under a promise of a cease-fire. Over 5,000 people were slaughtered.

beyond the front line to get food." We were ready to sacrifice fighters but not to surrender. Because we knew what would happen: rape, killing, insults and looting. This was the decision of the majority. There were a few people who wanted to surrender, but they had no influence. The decision of the majority was that we would prefer to die under shelling in our own camp rather than leave it and die with them.

*In spite of harsh siege conditions, social institutional work continued, and played a role in helping people to resist.*

Soon after the beginning of the siege, we in Najdeh invited the Social Committee to meet. We divided out the work, for example some with the wounded, some with people in the shelters. We had about 560 tins of milk powder, not enough for the whole camp, so we didn't distribute them. Instead, we stored them, and later they solved the crisis of nursing mothers and infants under six months. Without food or vitamins to make milk, mothers' breasts dried up and most could not suckle their babies, even those born during the siege. So our milk powder solved a very serious problem. And people were satisfied that there was an institution that would take care of mothers and infants.

We also distributed clothes — pyjamas, sandals, children's *dishdashas*<sup>18</sup> — especially to families whose homes were on the front line. When the siege began, it was still almost summer. When the winter weather came, many people were without winter clothes. We bought clothes from shops inside the camp and distributed them to children and social cases. There were some refugee families from Rashidiyya Camp who had no winter clothes with them, nor money, so we distributed clothes to them as well. We also organized daily visits to the wounded, to take them gifts and raise their morale.

A shell fell on one family, the boy of 12 years died straight away, and the little girl, one eye came out, and a piece of shrapnel entered the other. We went to the hospital to visit the girl and found her mother there, crying. "What is the matter?" "I have no money to buy food from the Popular Committee." We said, "No

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18. *Dishdashas* are long cotton shirts that 'Arab men in some areas wear, e.g. rural Egypt, the Gulf, but which in Palestinian camps are worn only by young boys.

problem. We are here. You have only got to contact us." Straight away I went and bought her food supplies on the Najdeh account, and gave them to her. We searched for such cases, all the time.

*It was while on a social mission that R almost got killed.*

They announced a cease-fire, so we said, "We'll go to the hospital to visit the wounded". Just before we reached the hospital, they started to shell it. We ran, we got separated, we didn't know where we were going. Suddenly we found ourselves near the [Amal] Co-operative. A woman shouted at us, "Where are you going?" We were on the point of leaving the camp, there was only one house between them and us. So we turned around, but we couldn't move. Shelling, shelling! Every minute something was coming down, twenty missiles. The woman took us into her house and we stayed there from 2.00 until 7.30 p.m. The shelling was so heavy there was no way to leave. When I got home I found my children all crying. My sister had sent to the hospital to ask about us, and had been told we hadn't arrived. They were sure I was lying dead on the street. I'll never forget coming home and finding them all in that state, my children crying, and my poor sister going 'round under the shelling to find out where I was.

*On 17 February Amal leader Nabih Berri announced from Damascus, Syria the lifting of the 'food siege' around Bourj al-Barajneh. Transmitted by Damascus radio, the announcement clearly had Syrian backing, and began to be put into effect on 20 February. This date marked a new stage in the siege, with women allowed to leave and re-enter the camp, but at the mercy of harassment and sniping.*

When they finally agreed to raise the siege on food and medicines, women and girls began to leave the camp. The first day, they sniped at and killed four women, but in spite of that people wanted to go out to fetch supplies. Amal also tried to stop anyone who left the camp from coming back. It was like that the first two days. On the third day I left. I had absolutely nothing left, but I went out mainly because my children needed treatment. One of them had burns, my little girl was wounded in the foot, and my eldest kept falling over from hunger. I had a boil on my head from which blood and pus oozed. As we were

leaving the camp, Amal fired at us. The children cried. The militiaman said to me, "Will you make them *shut up or shall I shoot them all?*" I said, "Brother, they are children, what can I do to them?" He said, "That child in your arms, I'll split her in two". I put my hand over her mouth to stop her crying, so we could just get out. He told me, "If you leave, you won't return!" We went a few steps, and another militiaman blocked us saying, "It's forbidden". I told him, "Brother, the one responsible told me to pass." He said, "I'm free. I don't want you to pass." I was carrying one child, and holding another by the hand, and two were clutching me from behind ... . He said, "We want to distribute milk powder now, and we want to photograph you." I told him, "I want to buy milk powder for my children, I don't want you to give it to me". They let us go, but they fired two rounds over our heads as we went.

There were two who went out to get food, and as they were returning they killed them. One of them was a young girl who used to work with us, Sena Ghadban, a lovely girl, quiet, nice. She was carrying food and had just entered the camp when they sniped at her. They continued to snipe at women up to two days ago.<sup>19</sup> And today they fired a missile into the camp. During this period, five women were killed and around fifteen wounded, either leaving or entering the camp.<sup>20</sup> All were sure they would get a bullet as they were leaving, but their children were hungry, they had to go out and fetch food.

Food is getting into the camp now. Women are going out every day, three or four times a day, to bring in food. They are stocking up, expecting another siege.

The family who got poisoned with sardines, I saw them as I went into the camp, they hadn't money to stock up. I had just been paid my salary, so I gave this woman all I had with me, because I could get it back from Najdeh. I had people outside to help me. Let her stock up. Perhaps there would be another siege, and she had nine children.

In the first period, it was forbidden to bring in candles, matches, batteries, *kaz* and *ghaz*. They would crush them under their feet. People were still going to bed in the dark, and cooking

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19. This was on 5 March. But sniping recommenced soon after.

20. By 15 March, the death-toll had risen to eleven women and four adolescent girls; by 22 March, it was 21, with 61 wounded.

with firewood. *Mar't Ahmad*, poor one, on the first day she went out and bought rice and *burraghul* and salt and sugar and cigarettes and cheese, around 50 kilos on her head. But could she pass? They stopped her at the Amaliyeh check-point, they searched her, and they found the batteries. They mixed up her rice with salt and the sugar, and stamped on it with their feet. That I saw.

My father is an old man, aged 75. He went out and bought a small Pepsi bottle full of petrol. At the check-point he was asked, "What's this?" He told them, "I and my wife are old and we don't have anyone. We need to get up at night to wash and pray". The militiaman took it and threw it against the wall.

Also, they are selling supplies to people of the camp at very high prices. At first, they took us to their co-operative and to shops in their area. Later, people went to buy wherever they wanted, but they raised the prices a lot.

Then I was told of a woman who had been shut outside the camp during the siege and who came back with her children to visit her husband. He met her at the entrance to the camp, and when he saw her he could not restrain himself from running out to greet her and embrace the children. They got him in the head, and he died instantly.

*On 26 March, for the second day running, women and children at Bourj al-Barajneh demonstrated against Amal sniping, demanding to be allowed to use the western exit from the camp instead of the eastern one, which leads directly into a Shi'a area. Mortar-fire directed against the demonstrators killed six women according to Palestinian sources.*

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## KADER IBRAHIM ABU SIAM (34 YEARS OLD)

I was only two weeks old when we moved to an area in East Beirut and stayed there until April 1975 when the massacre by the Phalange or the Kata'ib ignited the Lebanese civil war. We moved to Hadas, a Christian area, close to the Shi'a area, near Bourj al-Barajneh Camp in West Beirut, where we stayed for 10 years. Then the War of the Camps started in May 1985. During that time, my family moved into the camp and stayed with my uncle's family for six months. When the siege subsided, we moved north to Nahr al-Barid Camp.

I was already one of the *fidayeen* (freedom fighters) by 1976. In 1980, while I was in a military area in Bourj al-Barajneh Camp, a bullet was fired at a gas tank which exploded, causing great damage to the surrounding area. Unfortunately, I was standing nearby and my body was almost engulfed in flames. My face was totally disfigured, and I had to go through 37 operations in a span of two years to put my life back together. I cannot even begin to describe the pain I had to endure. Everybody knows that when you join a military organization you will face many risks, even death. But I think death would be a welcome relief rather than the kind of slow death many of us suffer.

My friends immediately took me to the American Hospital in town, but I was in such a very bad condition that they all thought I was already dead. I was admitted to the intensive care unit and stayed there, according to the doctors, for 22 days. I suffered amnesia, but eventually my memory returned. I had to stay in the hospital for about two years because of my condition. I was too weak to move, and the disfigurement of my face was too horrible to be viewed. The doctors removed some skin from my chest and grafted it onto my face as a new skin. I had partially lost my sight in both eyes. My organization wrote to many countries asking them to help me by providing an operation, but because I could not move, the operations were all done in the American University Hospital and paid for by the organization.

After two years I was discharged. I went on being a *fidayeen* as that was my only training, but I was given more office work because of my poor eyesight. My eyesight gradually became worse, and by 1985 I was completely blind. Life became even more difficult. I am now a *fidayeen* in name only. I cannot possibly march into battle, nor can I work, and I am always in pain.

When my family decided to move to Nahr al-Barid, I went with them. In 1986, I married this wonderful Lebanese woman Fatima Karom (27) from Badawi Camp. We had our first child, a boy, in 1988. Nidal is now seven years old. Ahmed came next in 1989; then Jihad in 1992 and the youngest, Nadya is now only four months old. After the marriage, I decided to return to Bourj al-Barajneh, little knowing what awaited us there. We stayed there for about a year, throughout the worst war in my life, the camp war.

The situation was very bad indeed. We were totally cut off from the outside world. In fact, the camp was in danger of falling. Earlier, in 1982, the PLO had agreed to withdraw their fighters from the camp — Bourj al-Barajneh was the strong base for the PLO Fatah fighters then — so that the continuous bombings and attacks on Beirut by the Israelis would stop, thus keeping the civilian refugees and the Lebanese in and around the camp area safe. That was the idea. As it turned out, we were betrayed by the authorities, who were indeed collaborating with the enemy. Directly after the withdrawal of the fighters and their weapons, the camp was bombarded with mortars and heavy bombs.

Then came 1985 and the opening of the 'War of the Camps'. People were dying not just because of the bombings, but also from loss of blood, lack of medicine, food, water and heating. Winter in the camp can be extremely cold and torturous especially for the sick and hungry. There was a time when we had had nothing for almost six months. Cats, dogs and mice were fast becoming the hated menu, although we knew it was dangerous to eat these animals because of diseases they might carry. But we had to do it to survive. If we tried to risk going out of the camp to find food, we would definitely be shot and killed. If we did not eat, we would definitely die of starvation. We were going to die one way or the other. At least with this 'food' some of us would still have the energy to fight back. By February 1987, some people even contemplated eating human flesh from those who had newly died. Just thinking of it makes me sick again. It was terrible.

When we could, we moved out to Nahr al-Barid. That was in 1988, and I have been here since then. The UNRWA built this house for my family. I was still receiving a regular salary from my organization throughout the period, although I was not an active member anymore, so at least we had some money to raise

our family. However, since 1990, after the Oslo Accord between Arafat and the Israelis, the organization stopped paying everyone on their 'pension' list. I needed about LL 150,000/- (US\$100/-) each month for my medicine alone, so I had to stop using medication, except for a medicated cream for my eyes.

Now life for me is more peaceful and safe, but not secure at all. I have no idea what the future holds for us and our children. At the moment we are living on the handouts of sympathetic people and organizations. Two of my children are sponsored by Bait Atfal as-Samoud, and an Islamic organization here in the camp donates an amount of LL 75,000/- (US\$ 50/-) a month to us and UNRWA gives us essential food rations. Sometimes people help us out, especially during Ramadan and the 'Id. They give us food and clothing for the children. It is a demeaning way to live.

If you ask me, I think we lost everything when the peace treaty was signed. We can neither go back to our homeland, nor will we be accepted as part of Lebanese society. And now we are facing a more serious problem. We have been hearing rumours that UNRWA will no longer be able to help us. This means our children will no longer have a formal education, because we cannot afford to send the children to private schools, and the government will not let Palestinian children enter Lebanese government schools. What will become of our children? Education, to me, is the pillar of life ... . I fear there is no solution to our problems. I don't care about myself anymore, but it is the children's future that I am worried about. I had hope before, but now, no more.

## SAMER SHAABAN (15 YEARS OLD)

**M**Y name is Samer Shaaban. I am the second child in my family. My two sisters, Ranya, 10, and Samar, 9, and I now live with our grandfather and grandmother, together with our three aunts. I am in the 3<sup>rd</sup> intermediate class in an UNRWA school. I want to tell you what happened in the War of the Camps in 1988. We were living in Shatila Camp in Beirut, my family: my father, mother and sisters. Although I was just eight years old then, I understood that there was fighting and our lives were in danger. I lost my father in that war. It was a horrible and difficult experience for me and, I know, for everyone else. There was no water, no electricity and, worst of all, there was no food. My sisters and I were very miserable because there was never enough food for everyone in the house, and we had to go hungry, sometimes for days.

During the war it was dangerous to go in and out of the camp to get food, and at some point we were totally cut off from the outside world. However, my parents had managed to store some food inside the house before the war started, and my mother tried to make sure that we had something to eat each difficult day, until there was nothing left. I will never forget how it feels to go hungry.

That fateful day, the day that changed our whole lives, started much like any other day, but ended tragically for us. It was to be the last time we were to see my father and my elder sister. My father was killed during one of the bombings and shootings. But I know my father died as a soldier. He was protecting the camp and the people in it, especially us, his family. I am proud of him. My elder sister, Amira, also became a victim of the war. She was hiding inside the school building when the bombing and shooting started, but a bomb fell on the school, and she was found dead under the rubble. She was killed almost at the same time as my father. At the time, my mother, my two little sisters and I were staying in the house because the camp shelter was already too crowded with people. There was no space even to breathe. So my mother decided that we would just stay on in the house.

News about my father's death reached us when the fighting stopped for a while, and then we heard about Amira. It was difficult to grasp the fact that we had lost two people we loved in just one day. I think it was terrible for my mother, but she was

strong and courageous and managed to keep us from hurting too much. I didn't really understand the losses we encountered, but I was sad because my father never came home. I remember my father as a very good person. He was always there when I needed him, when I was in trouble and when I was faced with the humiliating experience of having been bullied by other boys in the camp.

When the war ended, we resumed our life in the then shattered camp. My mother was not working. She was a housewife who had three small children to take care of. But she gave us her love wholeheartedly, and she sacrificed many things to make us happy, especially after my father died. I think we received some money from an organization; my father's family also helped us; and my sisters were put under Bait Atfal as-Samoud children's sponsorship programme, so they received some money from their sponsors. That helped us a lot.

We were a very close-knit family — at least I thought so — until my mother suddenly sprang the shocking news on us: she wanted to marry again and she did, in June 1994. I was angry, confused and sad all at the same time when she told us about her decision. I hated her new husband because I felt he had taken away from me and my sisters the one thing precious to us. My mother has since then moved to Syria to be with her husband. She left us. She just left us with our grandparents who were already old and needed, themselves, to be taken care of. Who would take care of my sisters? They were still small. My grandmother was already 65 years old and suffering from heart problems and a slipped disc. Also, she is a diabetic. It is difficult suddenly to become the man of the house — alone. Before I had my mother, and now I have no one. I don't know and I don't understand why my mother decided to leave us instead of taking us with her. She does write letters to me from her new home, and sometimes when I feel like it I write back to her. That is the relationship we have now. My sisters are still too young to understand. They miss our mother as I do, but there is nothing anybody can do about it.

I hate this life in the camp. There are many bad persons in the camp, and the environment is not good, either. People here are not conscious of the importance of cleanliness and good hygiene. My only comfort is school. At least I can go to school and learn. I love maths, and I want to further my studies to the highest level. I know education is the key to success. I just hope I

will have the chance to study, especially outside Lebanon. If it is possible I want to go to another country to continue my higher education and, God willing, I will become a doctor one day. I want to be able to go back to my real country, Palestine, armed with knowledge and experience to help my countrymen rebuild our homeland. As often as I can, I follow the news of what is happening in Palestine and to its people. Arafat left us here to cope for ourselves to go to 'little' Palestine when we should have it all back. Just like our own mother left us to fend for ourselves. As a Palestinian I want to go back to Palestine: to a free Palestine. That is my wish and what I pray for every day.

## AIDA SEN EL-FETI (53 YEARS OLD)

**P**ALESTINE, 1948: a neighbour told us that we had to leave because the Israelis were coming. I was about six years old then, the youngest in a family of six. My father had already passed away, due to an illness, so I never knew him. He, like many others, was a farmer and owned much land. We left in a hurry, my mother, my two sisters and three brothers, and many relatives, and we took nothing with us.

My mother was forced to work to take care of the family when we arrived in Lebanon. At first, we stayed in a little village in the south called al-Abbasiyah, where we lived in a tent. Then we moved on to Damour, where we took refuge in a small abandoned tunnel. The tunnel was only about twenty by nine metres, and living in it were nine or ten families with an average of four or five persons per family. It was terrible. There was no light, no water. We had to use oil lamps, and the only thing that separated us from other families were our clothes and some belongings which we arranged at night to separate our sleeping quarters. There was no privacy at all. And we lived there for about two years.

Then the Lebanese government forced us out of the tunnel, threatening to shoot anyone who refused to go. The UNRWA people came with a big truck and asked us to collect our things and get into the truck. We were taken to a site full of shrubs and tall grass which was situated in East Beirut, in an area called Tal al-Za'atar. The UNRWA gave us some tents to live in, and then we had to build grass huts for shelter. Thus was Tal al-Za'atar Camp born.

We lived in that hut until 1957. After that, tools and materials were available for us to build zinc houses, which everyone did, and only in 1973 were we able to build stone houses. When I was still small, I was already working in a nursery in East Beirut to ease the family's burden, and by 14, I was married off to a man from another village. My husband was only 17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>. We had six boys and six girls. Unfortunately, four of my children, three boys and one girl, died when they were young.

All of us survived the war of Tal al-Za'atar, and when the camp fell in August 1976, we left, but on our way out, the Kata'ib stopped us and took away my husband and my two sons. I was very distraught, but there was nothing that could be done. We were powerless. The Kata'ib then took me and my girls

with the rest of the people, first to Jounieh, a Christian town north of Beirut, and then to Faraya. There were not only Palestinians, but also Syrian and Lebanese families with us. They were taking us to be killed in a place called Eiyoun al-Siman. When we arrived there, the Kata'ib asked the Lebanese people whether there were Palestinians among us, but the good Lebanese said no. After many interrogations, the Lebanese were freed, and they took us with them to Baalbak, in the Biqu'a valley.

All this time, I believed all my sons and my husband were dead. My youngest son, Mustafa, was only 18 and still studying. Just before the war in Tal al-Za'atar, his uncle came from Germany to inquire about his son. He had received news that his son had died, so he came back to find out if it was true. The news was confirmed, and after a few days he got ready to go back to Germany. Mustafa said he would accompany his uncle to the airport, because it was not safe for him to go alone. Just after they left the camp, the war broke out, and Mustafa had no choice but to stay on in West Beirut.

I later learned that Mustafa went to the south and stayed with some relatives in al-Buss Camp throughout the war. When he heard about the fall of Tal al-Za'atar and that all the people had been killed, he thought the same thing had happened to his family, and he joined a Palestinian commando unit. He wanted to join a group of commandos in their mission to go inside Palestine, but was stopped by our relatives.

When my daughters and I arrived in Baalbak, I never imagined I would see any of my sons alive again. Some people said Mustafa had died in Saida, in South Lebanon. Until today, I've never really known what happened to my husband and my other two sons. Then one day in Baalbak, I met a friend of Mustafa's who had come from Saida. I asked him about Mustafa, and told him I knew Mustafa had died in Saida. I was shocked when he said my son was not dead. He was alive and well, and right then he was in the 'Arab University in Beirut. It was hard to believe, but I asked the boy to take me to the 'Arab University to search for Mustafa. The university had been turned into a makeshift hospital to treat the wounded from the war, especially the PLO fighters and commandos. I was in and out of the hospital for about 10 days searching for Mustafa until one of the soldiers became suspicious of my behaviour and called me up. I told him about my search, and then he realized I

was the mother of Mustafa. He told me Mustafa might be visiting his aunt, my sister, who was injured and in Beirut Hospital. He then took me there. My sister confirmed that Mustafa was still alive, and that he had been visiting her everyday except that day. Everybody thought that I and the rest of the family had been killed.

I could not believe Mustafa was still alive until I could see him. My sister told me to go to al-Jinah at the southern outskirts of Beirut, where her daughter was staying, also our brother and some other relatives. Maybe Mustafa would be visiting with them. I didn't know where this place was, but I went anyway – on foot. I asked people the way to the place and after one-and-a-half hours I arrived at the entrance of the village. It was already past 6.00 o'clock in the evening. I asked some people there about my niece, and they took me to her house. After a tearful reunion, I asked my niece about Mustafa and she told me that it had been two days since Mustafa last visited them. My brother then came to the house; he also told me that Mustafa was really still alive. They had all thought that my family and I had died in the siege.

My brother said that Mustafa was now in Damour and that night I should stay in his house and the next day he would take me to Mustafa. I refused to go anywhere or remain there until I had seen Mustafa with my own eyes, and in the end my brother relented and took me to Damour that very night. We went straight to the PLO operations centre in Damour, and I saw a friend of my kidnapped son. He hugged me and asked about his friend; painfully I told him about the kidnapping. Then I asked him about Mustafa. He said Mustafa was there and was having his dinner, but he would go and fetch him. I didn't recognize Mustafa at first when he appeared. It had been so long. I felt like a thirsty traveller given cool fresh water at the end of his journey.

After exchanging news, Mustafa asked me to rest the night and then to bring his sisters to live with him in Damour. The next morning, I went back to Baalbak to bring my daughters. We lived as a family again in Damour for about six years, until the Israeli invasion in 1982. By this time Mustafa had married Wafa, and Abier was born just a year before the invasion. During these years, I never stopped making inquiries about my husband and my other two sons. I went everywhere: to the IRC, the PLO offices. I wrote to BAS and other organizations to help me find my family, but all in vain. Until today I still do not know what happened to them, whether they are dead or still alive.

To survive, I worked as a cook for the organization. During the Israeli invasion in 1982, my family and I, along with all the other people, went to a place in al-Hamra. We stayed there until August that year when all the PLO commandos were forced out of Beirut, under pressure of the Lebanese government and American policy. After that we went to Shatila Camp and lived there until the massacre began in September. We didn't even realize what was going on until bombs started falling all around our place. There were masked soldiers everywhere, and I didn't know which side they were on. As we were leaving, Mustafa refused to go, although I begged him to come with us. He accompanied us to the entrance of the camp where there was a PLO building. There among the commotion, again I saw the masked soldiers with guns, and I felt very afraid for my son. Again, I begged him to leave Shatila, but still he refused. But in the end, when the situation got worse, he went with us to take refuge in the Gaza Hospital building. At that time it was still a hospital. But he stayed only a night. The next day he went back to the camp, and we went to a place called al-Mazra'a. We heard later that just an hour after we left Gaza building, the Kata'ib came and killed everybody hiding there, and even forced people to kill each other.

We stayed in a school in Mazra'a for about one week, after which we received company in the form of Israeli soldiers, who stayed for about two days. After they drove away, we went to stay with a friend for another week. It was there that I overheard someone tell my friend that my son Mustafa was killed in the massacre, but my friend didn't believe him. I went back to Mazra'a and stayed there for another week before going back to Shatila. Between 1982 and 1985, before the War of the Camps started, everyone was living in fear, afraid the Israelis might come back and destroy everything and kill anyone they saw, just like in the Sabra-Shatila massacre. Nobody could sleep during the night, and in the day we treaded very cautiously.

The first time that I entered Shatila after the massacre, I saw the dead being buried in a mass grave. I was so worried about Mustafa, but I found him alive and well in Shatila. Somehow he had escaped and survived. We went back to our old house, but on finding it destroyed we decided to rent a house just outside the camp in an area which later became the Amal militia's stronghold. Mustafa and his wife had two more children, Nisrine born in 1983 and Sabrine in early 1985. Sabrine was just five months old when the War of the Camps broke out in May. We

resumed our everyday life as best we could in those difficult days. Water and food were scarce, and there was no electricity. It was especially hard in winter.

The day the camp war started was also the first day of Ramadan. I didn't even realize the war had started because all through this time there was always fighting, intermittent bombing and shooting. One night I heard shooting and bombing outside our house, so I said to Mustafa I wanted to see what was going on outside. But Mustafa told me to go back to sleep as there was nothing to worry about, just the usual fighting. The next morning, however, we found out that all our immediate Palestinian neighbours had left, and our area was full of Amal soldiers. For four days we hid in our house in the dark because we dared not light the lamp for fear the soldiers would find us. We made do with what we had, cooking for the breaking of the fast with the greatest care so as not to make any noise, the same when we went to fetch water from the tank in the house compound. It was very difficult for the children.

On the fourth day, when Mustafa was about to pray the noon prayer (*zohor*), we heard the sound of guns outside our house and then all of a sudden there were soldiers inside our house. We were surrounded by as many as 50 Amal soldiers. They grabbed Mustafa and took him with them. In a few seconds he was gone. We shouted and screamed at the soldiers, begged them not to take Mustafa away. Everything was in chaos. We were screaming, the children were crying, and the soldiers were shouting at us. They herded us into another room in the house. One of the soldiers then began pouring kerosene all over the place. It was only then that I realized they meant to burn down the house, with us in it.

I cried for help and for mercy, but it was as if I never opened my mouth. I don't know what happened next because I lost control of myself. My family told me later that I became hysterical and began shrieking and shouting and tearing at my clothes until I was naked. My daughter brought a cloth to cover me, and begged the soldiers in the name of Allah not to take her brother away and to spare our lives. The soldiers cursed and insulted her with abusive words. However, one of them seemed to have a soft heart and said to his colleagues to leave us be. "We have taken her son. These are women and children. Leave them", he said. His friends became angry and hit him before they turned and beat all of us.

The good soldier ran from the room and went to his chief, who was in another house, and told him of the situation. He came back with his chief just as the soldiers were starting to ignite the kerosene. The chief shouted at his soldiers and asked all of us to get out of the house. A neighbour who originally came from Baalbak was also outside. I asked if he knew what happened to Mustafa but he answered no. The chief then asked him if he knew Mustafa, knew what he was working as, and if he knew us. To my shock, he said he didn't know any of us, and he never knew Mustafa. I guess he didn't want to get involved. I suppose they had taken Mustafa because they knew he was a PLO fighter.

Until that time I still was not aware that I was naked. Some of my family members were unconscious from the shock of nearly being burnt to death, and the others were too distraught to realize my condition. To our surprise, the Amal soldiers asked us where we wanted to go now, and I said I wanted to go to the Embassy area in al-Jinah where my family was staying. I didn't know then that that area was already under Amal control. We stayed in that area for about a month and a half. I never stopped trying to find out what happened to Mustafa, but nobody could give me any consolation.

Our next-door neighbour was from the south, and he and his family were very good to us. They knew what had happened to us and of my anguish about my son's fate, as I cried much of the time during those days. One day, a man by the name of Nur came to visit them, and, while there, heard me crying. He asked them about me and when they finished telling my story, Nur asked them to introduce me to him. They came to our house and Nur asked about Mustafa's particulars and said he would try to find out about him.

My neighbours told me that he was a good man and had a very high authority in the Amal militia organization. We were told later that Nur went to the Amal war prison, not far from the place we were staying. He told us that Mustafa was alive, but was taken as a prisoner of war. He took me to visit Mustafa in the prison. At first, the guard refused to let us in without the warden's permission as he did not know Nur. However, Nur knew the prison warden, Ali Hamoud, so he said to the guard that Ali Hamoud would do anything for him and that he had given permission for us to visit Mustafa. "What will he do to you when he hears you refused to let us in?"

The guard had no choice, and Nur asked for Mustafa to come forward. I saw my son coming towards us. At the same time, a group of Amal soldiers began encircling us and started to abuse me with bad words. Then one of them thrust his bayonet forward and threatened to kill me. Nur quickly pushed me and Mustafa aside and out of the way. Mustafa was kissing and hugging me and asking about his family all at the same time. He was very worried because he had heard of many cruel and bad things that the soldiers do to Palestinian women. I was so relieved to find him alive that nothing else seemed to matter. I assured him that everyone was fine and safe. After that day, I was granted permission to visit Mustafa every Friday during the next 45 days while he was held prisoner.

On the day he was supposed to be released, I went to the prison to wait for him. But as the last name was called of the prisoners who were to be freed, I began to feel frightened because Mustafa's name was not among them. I sat down on the sand and began to cry and beat the dirt. The guards came and asked me who I was waiting for. After I had told them, they asked me to go and see Abu Rabieh, the man responsible for the security of the organization. He was posted at the Bourj al-Barajneh security check-point. I went there and told him that the guards at the prison had told me that three days before Mustafa was to be released, Abu Rabieh had taken him away.

I was so scared at the time, thinking about Mustafa who could have already been killed and about my predicament, standing there all alone among the enemy. I was crying and babbling, and I think Abu Rabieh began to feel very impatient with my behaviour, so he shouted to a guard to bring Mustafa forward. There was a hole in the prison gate and he asked Mustafa to put his face in that hole so I could see him. I was crying more loudly now, but with relief, and at the same time feeling very apprehensive about his fate. What were they going to do with him?

I knew he had been put in a solitary cell and that, to me, was a sign of danger. Abu Rabieh then told me to come the next day to visit Mustafa. The next day I went again, together with Wafa, Mustafa's wife, and their daughters. Mustafa had put together some of his belongings, his watch, his identification document and some other valuables and left them with the guard. He asked me to take his ID and keep it for him, because if he did not have his ID, he wouldn't be able to get work when he got out of

prison. So I went to see the guard about his things. There I met with Abu Rabieh and he told me that he was going to exchange Mustafa for five Amal soldiers held prisoner by the PLO. Abu Rabieh had met with Abu Firas, the commander of the PLO militia, who had agreed to the exchange. The event would take place in Shatila. I was given Mustafa's things and together with Wafa and the children went along with the group who were taking Mustafa to al-Jinah in preparation for the exchange.

While in al-Jinah, the soldiers told us to go away because fighting might break out again. Although there was a cease-fire in the camp war, the peace was very fragile and sometimes fighting would just suddenly resume. The soldiers said that if we paid them they would take us to Shatila to see for ourselves that Mustafa was taken there. We did, and we were taken safely to Shatila to witness the exchange. When the time arrived and after we saw Mustafa being taken into Shatila, the soldiers took us back to the embassy in al-Jinah. Right after that the camp war started again. Mustafa stayed on in Shatila. We left the embassy and went to stay in the now deserted Gaza Hospital which had become home to refugees from Shatila and Sabra whose homes were demolished.

During the camp war, the path in and out of Shatila was closed, as it was very dangerous to cross it with the Amal militia waiting outside in the buildings around the camp. Whenever there was a cease-fire and the path reopened, we went to visit Mustafa, and sometimes he came out to visit us. During the 21 days' war, Shatila was totally shut off from the outside world and was heavily bombarded. At the first sign of a cease-fire, Wafa went inside Shatila to see if Mustafa was all right. He was staying in a very dangerous area of the camp, right between the Amal militia stronghold and the PLO check-point. She didn't see him there, so she turned around to search for him. On her way, she heard someone mention that a man by the name of Mustafa was wounded near the Masjid of Shatila. She hurried over to the Masjid, but there were only bloodstains left. She asked the people near the area if they knew who was wounded, and two men told her that it was the blood of Mustafa, and he was already dead. The body had been taken to the hospital. Wafa didn't know what to do. By then, the fighting had started again and the entrance was again closed, so Wafa had to stay in the shelter with the other people from the camp. Some of the people who were with Mustafa before he died told Wafa that he had

been worried about his family living outside, and he had meant to take all of them to live with him in Shatila. He had intended to do this the day he died.

I heard on the radio about Mustafa's death, but I couldn't believe it. Three times I had believed Mustafa to be dead, and he turned out to be alive and well. So this time I was determined not to believe anything until I had seen Mustafa with my own eyes, dead or alive. Some people came to see me to inform me of Mustafa's death, but I told them that Mustafa is still in the camp and his wife was there visiting him. When the path reopened, I went into Shatila to find Mustafa. The place was unrecognizable. Everything had changed from the days we were living in the camp. I cried, because the changes made me very scared. My heart felt very heavy, the same feeling I had when my husband and two sons were kidnapped by the Kata'ib in Tal al-Za'atar.

Nobody could tell me anything, nor had anyone seen Mustafa or his body, but everyone said he was dead. My daughter Zainab said she would go to Mar Elias to find out what happened because Mar Elias was the military centre for the PLO, and they would know what happened to their people. She was told that Mustafa was out meeting with some people, but just then a soldier entered the room and without realizing Zainab was Mustafa's sister, said aloud that it was a great loss to them that Mustafa was killed. Thus it was confirmed that Mustafa had died during the camp war.

Zainab was taken back to Shatila and came to the shelter where I was waiting with Wafa. The people there were making use of the cease-fire to distribute food rations. Zainab told me the news, and we were taken to where they had placed all the bodies of the dead, and there I saw with my own eyes the body of my son Mustafa.

I cannot describe to you the feeling of sadness, our losses in the war, our grief and our sufferings. Now Mustafa was really dead. I had lost all my sons. There was nothing else we could do. Mustafa died in 1986; a year had gone by since the start of the camp war.

We carried on living in the Gaza building until 1987 as we had no other place to go. Then during one of the many cease-fires, we moved here, to Mar Elias. One of Mustafa's friends was generous enough to buy a house and give it to us to stay in. He, himself, was blinded during the war.

For many years throughout our sufferings and unsettled life, I worked as a cook for the organization, so at least we had some earnings besides Mustafa's salary as a fighter, but now I haven't the energy to work anymore. Wafa is the only one working to keep the family alive. She has worked as a cleaning lady for the school and sometimes in other people's houses to make ends meet. Recently, she was given a full-time job as a school cleaning lady, so at least the income is regular.

All my daughters are married now and living their own lives. I still live with Wafa and my grandchildren. At least two of them are sponsored under BAS' childrens' programme. It helps the children to know there is someone out there who cares about them and sends some money and presents and letters. We make do with what we have, and although it is still difficult, now at least we are together, and we have managed to survive.



Wait for me, and I'll return  
Only wait very hard ...  
Wait. For I'll return, defying every death.  
And let those who do not wait, say that I was lucky.  
They never will understand that in the midst of death,  
You with your waiting saved me.  
Only you and I know how I survived.  
It's because you waited, as no one else did.

Konstantin Simonov<sup>1</sup>

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1. Quoted in Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (Oxford: OUP, 1991) 584.



## KHIAM PRISON

WHEN the Israeli invaders were pushed out of Beirut to the south and to what should have been their evacuation across the border into Israel-occupied Palestine, they created within South Lebanon a 1,940 square-kilometer (750 square-mile) zone which they handed over to a Lebanese fascist proxy militia, styled the South Lebanese Army. In that self-declared security zone they established Khiam Prison, notorious for the torture of many Lebanese and some Palestinians. There the Israeli army and their proxy remained until the year 2000.

The continuous sacrifice of Hizbullah guerrillas cost Israel the death of 800–1,200 soldiers over eight years, the attrition finally leading to Israel's unilateral withdrawal. Six thousand four hundred collaborators and their families fled into Israel-occupied Palestine when the Lebanese masses pushed south to break through the line in a rush to liberate the remaining prisoners.

US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy remarked that you have to see it to believe it as he joined the crowds in the narrow quarters and crowded cells from which 140 inmates were freed. Visitors saw metal bars from which inmates were dangled upside down or with only their toes touching the ground. During winter when snow falls at this 1,200 metre elevation, interrogators dowsed prisoners with icy water. In summer they were left to burn in the Mediterranean sun. Prisoners lashed to metal chairs received bursts of electricity. After months of interrogation, they could spend years in foetid cells; one man was held without trial for 14 years. Up to 25 men were in a 15 square-metre room; the isolation cells were too small to lay down in. Filthy hoods, chains and clubs were found, as well as crosses from which prisoners were dangled.

In a radio station run under the occupation, Hizbullah recovered a list of everyone permitted to enter Israel, including those in

the security services; panicked prison guards failed to destroy their own documents. A list was found of prisoners, their interrogators, and the guards, signed by the prison administration.

Suha Bchara, a Lebanese Christian communist party member, spent a decade in Khiam for trying to assassinate the military commander Antoine Lahd. She slept on a concrete floor for six years in a 180 × 90 cm. cell. Understandably, Suha is against any general amnesty for the torturers.

## KIFAH AFIFI (24 YEARS OLD)

**M**Y family and I witnessed four tragedies in our family. One of my brothers was killed by a bomb during the camp war, along with one brother-in-law. Another brother was kidnapped and until today we don't know where he is, whether he is still alive or dead. Another brother-in-law was killed during the Israeli invasion in 1982.

I was born in Shatila Camp, the fourth in a family of eleven. I was 13 when I joined one of the Palestinian organizations in the camp and immediately started training with weapons. I still went to school, whenever we could, whenever there was a cease-fire. I loved school, but every round of violence, every unfair killing in the family and injustice to my people, made me more determined to continue on the road I had chosen for myself.

Life during the camp war in Shatila was miserable and difficult. During a lull in 1988, when I was 17 and had just finished my high school education, I went to Ain al-Hilwih Camp in South Lebanon. There, the military organizations were still in power. I had made up my mind to join them, although at first they wouldn't let me, saying I was too young. But I was determined and adamant. After attending a short but intensive military training course, I was called up for my first mission, along with six other young men. Our mission was to enter Palestine through the southern border of Lebanon.

We started from Ain al-Hilwih in the morning, armed with only a map and our Kalashnikov rifles. For three days we walked. On the second night, in the mountainous area of Nahr al-Litani, we saw the Israelis all over the place, with their headlights flashing, scouting the area. Fortunately, they did not spot us. So we went on to cross a small river at the border and climbed Jabal Deir Memas, at the village of Taibi, until we reached our first destination, a small southern Lebanese village called Kfar Kela. It was the end of autumn, and we had only our army uniforms. I don't think I can describe how cold it was when we swam across the river in our uniforms and then, soaking wet, climbed over that mountain.

We were supposed to be there by nightfall, but unfortunately it was broad daylight when we came near a small house. We had no choice but to take refuge there. That was our mistake. As it turned out, the house owner was a spy for the Israelis. He secretly sent a note to the enemy telling them of our whereabouts.

The Israelis came quietly while we were in the house. The owner and his family had already gone out earlier. We did not suspect anything. The sun was directly in front of the house shining on our faces when we took a peek outside every now and then, so that we did not realize until the last moment that we were already surrounded. My friends and I fought to the last round of ammunition. I was injured in the head, but I still fought on. When we were left with only a grenade, my friends decided to surrender. I objected, but they went anyway so I was left alone inside the house. My friends were already surrounded by the Israelis. I wanted to throw my grenade at the enemy, but I was scared of hitting my friends; so instead I tried to slip out the back and bomb the house so they would think I was dead. But alas, the plan didn't work. I was taken prisoner along with my friends who were forced into a military car, while I was tied and taken into another car. That was the last I saw of them.

On the way, no one spoke. The Israelis just kept staring at me and gave me hard looks. I thought, well, this is the end. When we reached a place, somewhere in occupied Palestine, I was taken into a small room to be interrogated. Several female soldiers were there and at first they tried to talk to me quietly and kindly but when I did not respond, their tone changed. They sent for a male soldier who had a fierce and ugly look. He threatened to rape me if I did not co-operate. That terrified me, the threat of rape. I think I was ready and kind of expected the torture and mistreatment we had often heard the Israelis inflict upon Palestinian prisoners, but the idea of being raped was terrifying.

The man started to leer, made dirty remarks and movements, but I was stubborn. I swore to myself they could take my body, but they would never dominate my soul or break my will. I don't know how or why I was spared that nightmare, but the next thing I knew, I was bundled into a small cage, so small I had to crouch on all fours to fit in. Then the first torture started. The Israelis began to pour petrol all over me, and then started shooting between my legs, through the cage. The sparks from the bullets could easily have ignited the petrol, and I could have been burned to death. This was just one way they played with our lives.

I was put into a car, cage and all, and taken to the Lebanese border and handed over to the South Lebanese Army (SLA), inside the security zone. The SLA are on Israel's payroll. I began to realize that the Israelis were too smart to do the dirty job

themselves, but would let these wretched mercenaries do it for them. I knew then what was in store for me.

The beating started the minute my feet touched the ground. Then they bound me up from head to toe and tied me down to the car seat. I was taken to al-Khiam detention camp. Interrogation started and continued all day, the whipping became harder and harder and every time I collapsed, they would pour cold water on me and start whipping again. I don't know how I managed, but I stood my ground.

Torture by electricity came next. They tied my tongue, hands and feet and then passed the electric current through my hands, breast and ears. They threw water over me and passed the current again. This went on for two days, but still I had not opened my mouth. On the third day, they decided to give me some rice and beans, and a small cup of water. From that day on, I was given the same ration once a day. Enough to keep me alive.

My first 'room' was a dirty toilet with open sewage. I was forced to kneel on the ground all the time I was there, for three whole days, but it seemed a lifetime then. Then I was taken to a solitary cell that was so small I felt it was a coffin. I could not even stand up in it; instead I had to crouch. There was a small, thin mattress on the ground with a blanket. I stayed in that room for three months. Every morning and evening, buckets of water were thrown into the cell. As if the winter cold and the rain leaking through were not enough torture. I was lying on the floor with water around me. My feet were terribly swollen, my body was black and blue from the bruises and the cold, but worse, my kidney wound was open and the pain was incredible.

The wound was from a bomb shrapnel I received during the camp war in 1986. An Amal bomb fell on our house, killed my brother and wounded me in the kidney. I was taken for an operation but they could not take out the shrapnel because it was too dangerous. So I had been carrying this piece of metal inside me. Now, because of the beating and the terrible condition I was in, the wound became exposed. The SLA took me to the hospital, but I refused to be operated on. I would not trust my life to the hands of the enemy. So instead, they gave me some medicines to stop the pain.

After that I was moved to another room and met for the first time another prisoner. I thank God I was not so trusting because later I found out that the girl was a spy, planted in the prison cell to get information from the prisoners.

Being Palestinian was my unforgivable crime. Their deep hatred for my people was poured over my head for the rest of the six years I was there.

I was immediately blamed for every mistake or problem that cropped up, and as a result I had to be punished. I cannot remember one day passing without my being punished. As the days went on, the pain I felt grew less as if my body was already immune to all sorts of torture these beasts could think of. This is my one small triumph over my captors. They wanted to hear me scream and beg, but never again.

The SLA said that if any of us talked about our mission, our military group and activities, they would let us go. Some of the girls did talk or became spies for the SLA, but still they had to endure four or five years of torture. I was interrogated all the time, but I never once opened my mouth, so they said I would stay in the prison forever. They told me that my family were all dead, and I would be better off dead in the prison.

I was determined not to let these people scare me or rule me, so I was forever doing things that prisoners were not allowed to do. I sang Palestinian songs, I talked propaganda to the other prisoners, wrote political messages on the bathroom walls, anything I could think of to make me and the others strong. Although all the other girls were Lebanese — I was the only Palestinian among the 35 prisoners there at that time — I had a good relationship with them. Some of the captured girls were not even involved in anything military or political. The Red Cross was not allowed to visit the camp, and no hearing or investigation was carried out to justify the arrests made.

The Lebanese girls received money and clothes from their families. They were so kind to me. They gave me some of their clothing and bought me medicine when I needed it. I never asked for anything, for I knew they too came from poor families, and God knows how the families managed to scrape up enough to give them the money. In the prison we were totally isolated. We were not allowed to listen to the radio or to read newspapers or books, or to have any writing materials. All the news we received was carried in by new girls brought into the camp.

Because I was always thrown into a solitary cell, I knew how it felt when the others were given the same treatment. I took it as my duty to support these girls by sending encouraging messages and words of care. I used soap to write on small pieces of cloth. I used to put the messages in the garbage can or throw them from

between the bars when I had the opportunity. Then I discovered that if you roll the foil wrapper that comes on cheese, it could be used as a pencil, and the cheese box as paper.

Whenever the SLA caught me giving talks about the Palestinian struggle, I would be sent to the solitary cell which was the one full of water. I had to sleep on the wet floor. Once they found propaganda messages in the bathroom and, of course, straightaway they came for me. They grabbed my *hijab* — head covering — and pulled it away and then started shouting and pulling me by the hair. I was pushed around and around and then thrown against the wall. Instead of crying, I laughed. That angered them even more and made them madder, but I gradually came to the realization that it rendered them helpless also. They did not know how to deal with me.

During interrogation the soldiers interrogating me, especially the Israelis, never looked me right in the eye, nor were they ever left alone with me in a room unless I was bound and cuffed. I liked to think that they were somehow afraid of me, or more accurately, of my spirit of struggle.

During the dull long hours, when we were not being tortured, we thought up activities to engage ourselves. We were not allowed to have needles or thread, so we used to break the teeth of a comb, sharpen the teeth on the floor and use them as pins and needles. The wire line on which we hung our laundry became our crochet needles, while the threads of worn-out sweaters were used as thread. We learned a lot from each other. We did a lot of things, and these pieces I managed to hide — sewn inside my prayer mat — when I was released. They are treasures I will always keep.

In 1991, there was an *intifadah* (uprising) in the prison. We wanted better conditions: better food, clothes and health care. We started clanging the bars and shouting 'Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar'. The noise was deafening. All the guards came rushing in, stood in the corridor, and tried to shout above the din. Then they came straight to my cell and grabbed me as they knew I was the one behind this chaos. Again, they pulled my *hijab* and then held me by my hair and started beating and pushing and throwing me against the wall until I fainted. Through all that I never uttered a word. I was screaming and crying inside. I would never let these animals know that they had any hold on me. Finally they tore off my clothes till I was naked. I was forced to sit on a fire. God help me! But by that time I already felt dead.

To this day I never stop saying my prayers to thank God that I was never raped.

Six years passed. I had no illusions or hope that I would be released. Girls came and went. Only Suha Bchara who was captured after she tried to assassinate Antoine Lahd, the SLA leader, and I remained. We were always reminded that we would never leave that hell-hole alive.

Because of the terrible conditions in the prison and the bad treatment we received from our captors, we were always falling sick. The common illnesses were missing menstrual periods, flu, bronchitis and nervous breakdowns. Once they brought a girl infected with eczema and put her in our cell. Two girls and I were infected by the disease, but we received no treatment. Only when our condition became so bad that we could not eat or drink or sleep and the pain was indescribable, did they bring in a doctor, but we had to pay for the medicine. I didn't have any money, but the other girls bought it for me. After a while I was cured but only for a short time. The infection returned, and this time it was worse than before, such that even my nails peeled off my skin. For a year and a half, the eczema irritated my body, but I refused medicine because I didn't want to owe anybody anything which I knew I could never repay. By and by, the disease cured by itself.

At the beginning of summer of 1994 a new girl was brought into my cell, and we became good friends. On 3 August 1994, I was awakened in the middle of the night by someone who ordered me to follow her. I was surprised, but protested because I wanted to go back to sleep. The woman came nearer and whispered that I was being released. Automatically my response was that she had mistaken me for the other girl. But then this woman showed me some papers and my name was there. I was speechless, but in a few minutes I was ready.

I did not understand how my freedom came about, but at that moment I was actually feeling sad about leaving all my friends in the prison. The hardest moment was saying goodbye to them, especially Suha. I was ordered to sign some papers, but I refused. I was not signing anything until I was safe at home, if they were taking me home. In the van, the guards who were with me started playing with my nerves. They told me that I was being taken to be shot and not to be released. I couldn't help but believe them, until I saw the Red Cross car. I was handed over to the Red Cross; they signed some papers on my behalf, and then I was on the longest trip I ever had, back home to my family.

Today I am actively involved in voluntary work for Palestinian refugees and ex-prisoners. I am also a human rights activist, to make the world know what is happening to prisoners of war especially in Israeli prisons. If anyone were to ask me if I would be willing to go through all those moments again for the sake of my people and homeland, the answer would be yes. I want to die in a free Palestine.



Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.

— Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile"



## WRETCHED OF THE EARTH

THE aftermath of Sabra and Shatila did not end the harassment of the Palestinians by both the Lebanese government and the Lebanese Forces. Anyone who had ever been employed by or received help from Palestinian institutions including hospitals and clinics was arrested, if not by the Israelis, then by the Lebanese. The government never considered the Sabra and Shatila massacre as a crime and openly declared its determination to achieve the massacre's still unfulfilled goal: the ouster from Lebanon of the entire Palestinian community. The government announcement that the Palestinians who arrived in Lebanon in 1948 would be allowed to remain, was in many cases vitiated by the 'proof' required. On the contrary, Shafiq Wazzan reportedly told Italian senators that his government planned to expel all Palestinians from Lebanon, numbered at 500,000.

The Lebanese Army joined with the Maronite militias in terrorist attacks aimed at stampeding Palestinians to flee, and arrested or kidnapped Palestinians and their friends inside and outside of the camps, holding them without charge in secret detention centres, denying them any contact with the outside world and denying their families any knowledge of their whereabouts or even of their continued existence. Women were not spared.

Medical supplies brought in by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society were confiscated by the army. Government refused to renew permits for foreign doctors and medical personnel who were working in PRCS hospitals and clinics.

The official media pictured the Palestine Research Centre as the hub of the terrorist network. An explosion in the Centre in February 1983 killed the wife of the director, and three other high-level Palestinian officials were arrested and deported. All institutions that employed, aided, or represented Palestinians came under attack. Palestinians in West Beirut living outside the camps, some even holding Lebanese passports, also suffered. Palestinian shops and buildings were often blown up. Police

bulldozers razed homes of Palestinians in the area of the Kuwait embassy. Palestinian families were faced with demands for exorbitant rent increases and evicted if they did not pay. This was compounded by labour laws which denied Palestinians employment. Inability to work, combined with the constant threat of arrest or worse, led many young men to try to leave Lebanon.

The 300,000 Palestinians living in the occupied south fared even worse. Israeli troops encouraged the proliferation of Palestinian-hating militias. Throughout Saida, the Kata'ib pasted notices calling on every south Lebanese to fulfil "his duty to kill at least one Palestinian" and the Kata'ib toured the city warning Palestinians through loudspeakers to "leave or face extermination".

The unexpected result of their murderous campaign was that workers formerly employed outside the refugee camp of Ain al-Hilwih which had been 90% destroyed, joined with others inside, to rebuild it. Certain American Jewish organizations donated 100 tons of cement,<sup>1</sup> and UNRWA eventually provided funds. An Israeli popular committee, headed by former IDF colonel Dov Yermiya, who had been dismissed for refusing to fight the Palestinians, provided 10 prefab school buildings.<sup>2</sup> A year after the start of the rebuilding project it was almost completed.

Harassment and intermittent attacks against the Palestinians in Lebanon have never really ended. It is incredible that the people could psychologically survive. Part of the credit must go to Bait Atfal as-Samoud (Home for the Children of the Steadfast) which has established Social Worker Centres in most of the camps through which Japanese, Malaysians, and others sponsor over a thousand Palestinian fatherless children. You will read in these testimonies of the meaning of the sponsorship programme to individual Palestinian women who are now forced to head single-parent families.

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1. Dov Yermiya, *My War Diary: Israel in Lebanon*, transl. Hillel Schenker (London: Pluto, 1984), 134. The American branch of the Joint Distribution Committee also donated 2,500 gas heaters and 500 children's winter coats.

2. *Ibid.*, 140. Yermiya's group, now widened to include Israeli Palestinians, also brought in 50 tons of clothes and shoes, including 4,500 pairs of children's winter boots. *Ibid.*, 135.

Unless credited to the contrary, the above was excerpted from Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle Over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987) 299-302.

## SUBAHIYAH MAHMOUD (36 YEARS OLD)

MY husband was born in Bourj al-Shemali, a refugee camp in South Lebanon, while I was born here in Nahr al-Barid in the north. When I was 16 years old, our marriage was arranged, and the ceremony took place in Tal al-Za'atar Camp in East Beirut, just before the first siege began in 1975. My husband was 22 years old then, and he was also a *fidayeen*. We didn't know that a siege was about to happen in Tal al-Za'atar. As it was, we were trapped in the camp for about 15 days and had to live through heavy bombardment by the enemy. Because nobody expected a siege, the food and water supply was gone in just a few days. There were thousands of people in the camp with little food or water.

My husband managed to smuggle himself out of the camp and went to Tyre in South Lebanon to join his unit, and after the 15-day siege, the people cautiously began to leave the camp. I went together with my brother and his wife, intending to go to Tyre, but on the way out we were stopped by the Kata'ib, who ordered us to walk over and look at the dead to see what they could do to people who did not follow their orders. Bodies were lying all over the place. Then they asked us to bury the corpses. We had no choice but to obey orders, and when we had finished, they shot my brother dead. Just like that. My brother was not a soldier, but because he was Palestinian, it was his fate to die. They let my sister-in-law and me go, but we had to leave my brother lying on the street. It still haunts me to this day.

My husband had a house in Tyre, and I stayed there with my in-laws while he went out fighting. Maybe two or three days out of the week he would be home. This went on for two years. It was a difficult life, full of fear and anxiety, but it was better than the short time I experienced in Tal al-Za'atar. In 1978 our first child, Haissam, was born, and my husband came back to see his son. By then, the situation had become very bad in the south. There were heavy bombardments almost every day, and Israeli air raids were becoming more frequent. There was a time during the many outbreaks of fighting when I lost contact with my husband. For nine days I received no news about him. It was terrible. All sorts of thoughts and images passed through my mind. But he came back home, alive and well.

When Haissam was about six months old, he became deaf because of a bomb which fell near our house. The sound was so

loud that it damaged his hearing. Then my husband decided I should move to Damour for safety.

While I was living in Damour with Haissam, my husband came to the house every chance he could. Sometimes he managed to stay a week or ten days or a month with us. We had two more children: Ahmad, born in 1979 (although we were in Damour, Ahmad was born in Tyre) and Iman, born in 1981, in Beirut.

Our nightmare began in 1981. I was pregnant with Iman. The situation at the time was calm and quiet. My husband and I went to Tyre city to visit our friend. We were having lunch when the sounds of bombing were heard quite near the house. Fighting had started again. My husband, as he was a fighter, quickly left the house. I don't really know what happened but sometime during the fighting, my husband was seriously wounded. Not long after, a group of people came to the house and told our friends what happened, but they didn't tell me the truth then. Instead, they said my mother-in-law was injured and that I should go to see her.

So I went to my mother-in-law's house, but when I got there I found she was well. Then a person came to see me and told me that my husband had been shot in the leg and was now being taken to the Gaza Hospital in Beirut. I was shocked and frightened, but I managed to ask someone to drive me up to Beirut.

When I arrived at the hospital, my husband was being operated on, so I had to wait. When the operation was over, the doctor told me my husband was in very bad condition. 'But how could that be, when he was only shot in the leg?', I asked. Then the doctor gave me the bad news. My husband had suffered a massive blow to the head, caused by a splinter from a bomb, and at the moment he was in a coma and completely paralysed. He had to be put in a special ward.

I had to wait for nine days before they let me see him. My husband was warded for two months. His condition was stable, but there was still no improvement. His brain had been damaged, and he could not talk or move his hands and legs. While my husband was at the hospital, I gave birth to Iman. After two months, the doctor was satisfied with my husband's progress and they transferred him to Haifa Hospital for physiotherapy. I stayed in Beirut all this time, leaving the family to take care of my two boys in Damour.

My husband was released after a month, but he still had to go to the hospital daily for his therapy. The doctor said my

husband would gradually regain the use of his hands and legs. For a year my husband visited the hospital so he could continue to have his exercises. It was only seven months later that my husband regained his voice. At first it was incomprehensible, just like a baby talking, but gradually his voice gained strength and became clearer.

His recovery was very slow. He had many nervous breakdowns. At such times he became hysterical and started shivering and trembling all over. He had to take his medication regularly. His memory was disjointed and blurred. Sometimes he could remember things from far back in time, but at other times he could not even remember what had happened to him. He had difficulty remembering the war.

Those were terrible days for us. We had little money, but the PLO paid all my husband's hospital and medication bills, and we received monthly help from them; otherwise we could not have survived.

After my husband completed his therapy at Haifa hospital, he was sent to Russia for a second operation on his head, but when he came back, we found his condition had not improved at all. The doctors then decided to send him to Syria for the next operation. I decided to go with him, and moved the family to Syria. So we stayed in Yarmuk Camp in Syria while my husband went for his operation and treatment. The operation was no greater success than the others, except that now they managed to cover the hole in my husband's scalp.

After two years, his communication skills came back to normal, but his memory was still jumbled up. Today, he can sit on his own and walk slowly. His hands are better, and he only has to take medication for his nerves, because he still suffers from nervous breakdowns at least once a month and sometimes twice a day. We stayed in Syria for about five years from 1982 to 1987. We had two more children, twins, Mohamed and Joumana in 1985. I came back to Nahr al-Barid to give birth to the twins and then went back to Yarmuk camp. My children went to school in Syria.

When we came back to Lebanon, we stayed here in Nahr al-Barid. The house in which we are living now has been lent to us by a Lebanese friend until we can find and afford a house of our own. Actually, this was meant to be a garage, not a housing unit, so we have no bathroom or kitchen or rooms. We erected this wall to make a room at the back, and this space has become our

hall, kitchen and dining hall all in one. The toilet is outside. We cannot afford to live in the camp as the rent for a room there costs about Lebanese Pounds 100,000/- a month.

The two eldest boys have stopped schooling now because they have found it difficult to continue their studies here in the UNRWA school. In Syria, they had not studied English, so it was hard for them to follow the lessons here. And Haissam found it more difficult to adjust because of his deafness. He stopped schooling when he was only 12 years old, and Ahmad left when he was 13. Now both of them work whenever they can find jobs they can do. Haissam is 17 years old now, and he concentrates on being a house-painter. When he is working, he can manage to earn about LL 6,000/- or LL 10,000/- a day. Ahmad, 16, does any kind of job he can find, and sometimes he can earn about LL 50,000/- a month.

Iman and the twins are still in school, but at 14 Iman is beginning to care more about her appearance than her studies. The twins are now the only hope of the family because they are good at their studies. I don't know what we will do if the owner of this garage wants it back to start a business, since the owners of other units in this row of buildings have already started businesses. I hope we can get a house soon.

## HANAN AL-KOTT (21 YEARS OLD)

IT is difficult to talk about my family because the pain and the sadness are still there and it hurts even to remember, but I will try to tell the story of our family. My father was born in Umm al-Faraj, a small village in Acre District of Palestine, in 1943, just five years before the historic exodus began. His family took refuge here in Rashidiyya Camp, South Lebanon, living a life of poverty and restlessness, in a shabby tent, as did many others. My father had to work from a young age. He told us he realized from very young that if he did not work, he could not eat. He never had a chance to go to school, and he grew up as a simple and illiterate man, but a very hardworking one. In Rashidiyya, most people worked in the fields as farmers. The land is fertile, and it was the land that kept us alive. In 1970, my father married my mother, Haniyah, and after two years Hala, the eldest in our family, was born. I was born in 1974, followed by my sister Salam in 1976, my brothers Ahmad in 1977 and Mahmoud in 1981. The two smallest ones, Kifaya and Fatima were born in 1984 and 1985 respectively.

In 1982, when I was just eight years old, we had to suffer through the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It was terrible, but we survived. At that time my father was also responsible for his brother's family because his brother had been captured by the Israelis and had been sent to Ansar detention camp. Despite the danger, my father worked in the fields along with his brother's wife to keep both families alive. I had thought then that when the war was over, we would continue our lives, although difficult, but at least in peace. It was not to be. In 1986, again, we experienced the hardships of war, this time during the War of the Camps. Rashidiyya was under siege for about six months. We were fast running out of food supplies. By now, there were altogether seven of us, nine including our parents. We ate the last morsel of food that day and we were still hungry, and I think it hurt my father so much to hear the little ones crying of hunger. It was already near the end of the siege, although we did not know it at the time. That day, on 9 February 1987 my father went out to the orchard, and he never came back. He was killed by a sniper's bullet that went right through his head.

We were numb with shock. It was difficult to accept that he was dead and would never come back. My father was a very loving man. He loved children so much and, although we were

poor, we were a happy family. Now all the burden of feeding and clothing us fell heavily on my mother's shoulders. She took over my father's job in the fields when the war was over. She worked long hours in the fields so that we would have enough to eat. Hala took care of the family, although she was just 15. She had left school at the age of 13 because my father could not afford to cope with four school-going children. Salam, Ahmad and I continued our schooling even after my father died. My mother had to work extra hard, and sometimes she accepted double shifts in order to get more money for the family. After the death of my father, we moved into a room in a house near our uncle in Jiyeh, a small village on the coastal road to Saida. My mother decided that it would be safer for us to move near our uncle's house, because there was no man in our house. Ahmad was then just 10 years old.

We never realized there was anything wrong with mother until it was too late. It was just a year later. She was a selfless woman who wore herself out trying to feed and clothe us better. But one day her body just could not endure the pain anymore, and she had to go to the doctor and again we received shocking news that just tore us apart. My mother was suffering from breast cancer. It was already at an advanced stage, and the doctor had no hope at all that she would survive, even with an operation. In any case, we didn't have the money to pay for an operation and for the medicine she would need. We were all beside ourselves with grief. We could not lose our mother so soon after our father. But there was nothing we could do. We had to move back to Rashidiyya to be near the UNRWA and the PRCS clinic that supplied the medicine for my mother.

At that time, the decision was made for us. Hala was getting married, and my mother was dying. I had no choice but to quit school. My mother, who was always so strong, was now struggling to stay alive. She suffered for two years, the last in her bed. It was the most heart-wrenching experience for me to watch my mother slowly die in front of my very eyes. My brothers and sisters continued their schooling. Hala helped me out whenever she could, and we received help from Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS) through their children's sponsorship programme. After I quit school, I learned to do embroidery at home, and sometimes I would join my brothers and sisters in their studies so as not to forget.

My mother's condition became worse and we dreaded the day she would leave us. It came eventually; she died on 19 October 1990. Now we were really left on our own.

In 1988, when we moved back to our house in Rashidiyya, my uncle and his family — his wife and 12 children — came with us, and we stayed in the same house. It was crowded, but then we were family. After my mother died, the people from BAS wanted to take us to their foster house in Nahr al-Barid, because we were now orphans and underage. There, everything would be provided for us: clothes, food and schooling. However, my uncle refused to let us go, saying that he was responsible for our family, so he would take care of us, however difficult it might be.

It was difficult indeed, but later we moved to another house, a bigger one, but as with any family thrown together by circumstances, there were problems and a strained atmosphere. I tried to smooth things over by doing housework for both families and coping with the needs of my smaller siblings who were still too young to understand the reason why mother went away. Ahmad, however, had trouble adjusting, and left to live with one of our aunts in Tripoli for two years. He was just 13 then.

He came back a different person. He was already very much the man of the house, mature, with a solid self-confidence at age 15. He calmly discussed our situation with our uncle, and when everything was settled, he took us to move in with our grandmother in our old house. It was a relief to live together again, just the six of us and grandmother. Basically, our life returned to normal. I am now the 'mother' and Ahmad has become the 'father', although he is still in school. I stay home to take care of the house and grandmother while my brothers and sisters go to school. Ahmad is an excellent student with a scholarship at the al-Quds al-Sharif school, a private Palestinian school near here. Salam is also studying in the same school. Besides the scholarship, they also receive money from their sponsors through BAS. The others are just like any other average student in the UNRWA school. I take a very deep interest in their schooling because I myself, missed school, as did Hala. But that is our destiny; it is our life to live.

Earlier this year, in February 1995, grandmother passed away peacefully because of old age. Again we buried someone close to us. I don't know what is in store for us in the future. I hope Ahmad, who is now 18 years old and in his last year in school, can make something of himself. And so I hope for the others.

## TAMAM ABD. EL (34 YEARS OLD)

I was from Tyre in the south. I got married when I was just 15 years old, and my husband was 19. We were married in Algiers. That was in 1976. My husband, who was from Tripoli in North Lebanon, worked as a painter. For a year after our marriage, we stayed in Algiers, then we moved to Damour in Lebanon, where we stayed for a few years. We moved about a lot before settling down in Bourj al-Barajneh Camp in Beirut. After Damour, we moved to the Biq'a valley, where we stayed for three years. Then we went to Tripoli for two years, and only in 1984 did we move here. My husband was also a *fidayeen* (freedom fighter), so at least when he could not find a job, he still had money given by the PLO. When we were in Damour, in 1978, I gave birth to Camilia. She is married now and lives a happy life with her family.

In one of the many Israeli air raids, I was heavily wounded in my leg while trying to escape. I was sent to Gaza Hospital and was warded for eight months for the doctor to treat my wound. Camilia was only one year old then. My mother took her to stay with them in Bourj, while I was in the hospital. I had to endure many operations to save my leg. It healed, but now I am lame and most of the time I still feel pain. It is difficult for me to tell this story for it still hurts me to remember the pain I suffered. I thought I would rather die. For some time, until a few years ago, I took medication to ease the pain, hoping eventually the pain would go away, but nothing has changed. Now I have stopped taking any medicine because I do not feel it will make any difference. I will suffer my pain in silence.

Moving from one place to another is always difficult, especially in our situation. I hated it when we lived in Wavell Camp in the Biq'a valley. My husband could not find any work, and we were just living on the money the PLO gave my husband. It was difficult, especially in the winter. The cold made my pain worse. We were in Wavell Camp when the Israeli invasion took place.

My husband was a good man, father and soldier. He died in 1986, during the camp war. We had just moved into Bourj for about two years. He bought this house for us to live in. Although it is not much, at least we have a place to call our own. I loved living here not only because my family was also here, but conditions were better, and at least we could live a healthy and normal

life. But it was not to be as a whole family. My husband was on the street when a bomb fell and killed him. It was terrible, receiving the news of his death. Camilia was only eight years old, and I was two months pregnant. I had two other daughters at the time, Rubiah, who was five, and Ghada just three years old. When a son was born to me, I named him Khir after his father.

For 11 years now we have lived in this house. Life could not be any better now, nor do I expect it will get better. My only hope is that my children will have the chance to finish their studies and make something of themselves, and not have to suffer all the difficulties that I have gone through. They are good students, and I thank God that they are sponsored, for I don't have the money to take care of their needs. I cannot work because of my bad leg and taking care of the children and the house has taken its toll. I am always sick, and when that happens the children take care of me. I have never borrowed any money from neighbours because I know I will never be able to repay it, but I do receive some help from good-hearted people here in the camp.

At least now the war has stopped, but for how long I don't know. Our struggles, pains and sufferings are still very much present in our day-to-day survival; in fact it is much worse now than before.

## HANIYEH SNOUBAR (39 YEARS OLD)

I was born in Rashidiyya in the south, and lived there until I married in 1980, when I was about 24 years old. My husband who was 15 years older than me came from Bourj al-Barajneh, so after the marriage, I came here to stay with him. He was a water-seller. He took good, clean water from Rashidiyya and sold it in the Sabra–Shatila area. My husband was not a healthy man, because he was asthmatic; so sometimes he couldn't work due to his ill-health.

When the Israeli army reached Beirut in 1982, like many others, we had to flee the camp, and went to al-Hamra until the situation improved. I thought we would be there for only a short time. It turned out to be two years. It was a very miserable life in al-Hamra for me because we had nothing. We couldn't take anything with us when we ran. There was no food or drinking water, and the place where we stayed was horrible, for it was dark and damp and it stank. Actually, it was a corridor of a building that was once a hotel. We had no place to go back to after the invasion was over. I was thankful that at this time we did not yet have children. It was difficult enough for me and my husband without a child to think of.

However, a year later, in 1983, I gave birth to my son Mohamed, and then Fatmah was born the following year. I was pregnant with Nabiha when at last we managed to go back to Bourj al-Barajneh. But luck was not with us. Not long after we settled in, the camp war started in 1985. The situation became very dangerous, and communication with the world outside the camp ceased. So did food supplies and everything else. It was terrible. With two small children and a heavily pregnant wife, my husband was naturally very worried about our condition. Many people had left the camp when they could, usually at night to avoid snipers.

So, a day after I gave birth to Nabiha, my husband said we would leave the camp at dawn the next day and go to Rashidiyya because he was afraid conditions would get worse and we would die in the camp. At about 6.00 o'clock the next morning, we went out quietly and walked towards the entrance of the camp. We could only take the clothes on our backs. My husband carried Mohamed, then only two years old, and Fatmah a year younger, and I carried the one-day old Nabiha in my arms. It was painful and tiring for me to walk the short distance

out of the camp to the taxi stand. I'm sorry, but it is very hard for me to recall all this.

We went past the Palestinian check-point to where the danger lay because there, outside the camp, was where the Amal militia was located. Amal was shooting around the camp, and we barely missed being hit. I could feel bullets flying over our heads. After clearing the short but dangerous path, we found a taxi driver who was willing to take us to the south, but we had to pay him LL 6,000/-. It was very expensive, but my husband paid him and our journey began. It seemed that everyone was leaving Beirut. There were so many cars on the road to the south that it took us nearly three hours to arrive at Tyre, whereas normally it would take just an hour-and-a-half.

When we arrived in Rashidiyya, I found that my family was waiting for me and they were happy and relieved to see me and my family. They told us that ever since the camp war started they had been waiting for me to come home. Each time they heard there was a car from Beirut, they would rush out to see if it was us.

We stayed in Rashidiyya for about three months in a small room of a house that we shared with 12 others of my family. It was not so bad considering the danger and difficulties we faced in Bourj. When news about a cease-fire reached us, my husband decided to go back to Bourj. We went back only to find that our house had been destroyed. My husband scouted around for a place to stay, and he found this house where we are staying now. But back then, it was just a box of a building, with no windows or door, and the roof leaked badly.

When the war was over and conditions improved, my husband started working again, as his health permitted, and he also worked on the house. He put in windows and a door, and we started life anew. I was very sick when I was pregnant with my last child, Hassan, and I had to have a caesarian section at Hilal Hospital. The pain persisted after Hassan was born; so I had to have another operation for my back. It left me lame, as you can see. It still hurts from time to time, and it makes walking difficult. I cannot do heavy work anymore. Also I cannot stand the cold. The doctor advised me to have another operation, but I had no money, and I was scared that I would not survive. If I died, what would happen to my children? Even though I am lame, I can still do some work and earn some money for my children. It is more difficult now that my husband is no longer with us.

My husband died in 1993 because of his asthma, which had become worse. He had no medication, and at last his body could no longer take the attacks. As I was not working then, we lived in poverty and depended on donations and the sympathy of others. Our neighbours were very good to us. They gave us food and old clothes for the children and extra clothing in winter because winter in the camp is terrible if you have no heater. We could not afford to buy food, much less a heater. The food ration from UNRWA — flour, sugar, oil, rice, tea and such — helped us to go on with life each month. There was nothing in the house even to sell. We had no sofa or mattress or things of value. We slept on the floor with just some blankets beneath us and one to cover us.

THREE CHILDREN: SAFIYA (14), KHALED (12)  
AND SAMAR (10)

*Safiya:* During the War of the Camps in 1985, we were living near the Sport City area in a small house. When everyone had to leave the place during the shooting and bombardment, we stayed on. I don't know why, because I was only four at the time. One day, my father went out to get us some food, and that was the last time we saw him. He just disappeared. Completely disappeared. Until today we don't know what happened to him.

I think the Israelis kidnapped him. Sometimes I think he is still alive, but now I don't know anymore. My father was in the construction business, before he disappeared. We continued to live in the same area after that, but not long after my mother remarried in 1990; her husband asked her to leave us and go with him. So we were left on our own. Our aunt (my mother's sister) and uncle took us in with them.

*Khaled:* It is good that she remarried, but the man she married is not good. But that is her luck.

*Samar:* I am happy that my mother is married again.

*Safiya:* At the beginning, our stepfather was good to us, but I think he was influenced by his friends. He became lazy and didn't do any work; just sat around with his friends.

*Khaled:* Yes, sometimes he was good to us, but he ill-treated my mother, and I didn't like that.

*Safiya:* My mother has two children with her new husband, one boy and one girl, aged three and two. More than a year ago, her husband just left her and the children. He was a Syrian; maybe he went back, we don't know. My mother has found a job as caretaker of a building near Abu Shaker Street in the city. She cleans the stairs and cares for the lights in the building, and the owner gives her a small allowance and lets her stay in a small room in the basement. The children stay there when she works.

After we moved in with our aunt and uncle, who had 13 children of their own at that time, there was a quarrel between Uncle Mohamed, my father's brother, and my aunt. Uncle Mohamed wanted us to live with him and his family, but my aunt and uncle refused to let us go. She said she was the sister of our mother, and therefore closer to us, and she treated all of us

like her own children and was the closest we could get to a mother's love in the place of the mother who abandoned us for the love of an unworthy man.

*Khaled:* I prefer to live with our aunt and uncle rather than live with Uncle Mohamed.

*Safiya:* My aunt's house is situated in the Sabra area near Shatila. It is actually a small two-room flat with a small kitchen and a balcony. One room is for my aunt and uncle, the baby and the smaller ones. The other one is where the boys sleep, while the girls sleep on the balcony. There are altogether 16 of us now living in this cramped place, with 14 children aged one month to 20 years.

My uncle works as a salesman and does some odd jobs to support his family, so he is out of the house almost all the time. Sometimes, Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS) helps us out, and sometimes my mother gives us some money. My uncle's son, who is now 20 years old, works as a painter.

*Khaled:* But he doesn't work all the time. From time to time he just sits around with us at home when there is no work. All of my uncle's daughters are not working. They take care of the smaller children and of us.

*Safiya:* I am still in my 5<sup>th</sup> elementary because I missed so much time at school due to the family problems we faced. Before the war, I was not very good in school. I didn't think of studying so much because of the problems in my family and other things. I couldn't concentrate. Now life is better, and I have made up my mind to do better, to study and get good grades. It helps that now I have a good teacher who listens and encourages me and gives me special attention.

*Khaled:* I was not doing any good in school, either. I didn't study as much as I should. I just didn't care. I love birds, so I spent all my spare time with birds or among people who know about birds. There was a place near the house where pigeons flocked together, and there was a man who sat with them. I went there every day to sit with him and try to catch one of the birds.

But my aunt never let me keep the birds in the house. There was not enough space for a person to live in our house, so I could not simply add a bird or two. So I took to the roof and

built a sort of cage, big enough for the birds to fly about. I spent most of my time up there. But recently the owner of the building decided to cover the roof so I had to tear down the cage. I had nowhere to put my birds. There was no alternative but to let the birds go. Now in spring, there are so many birds coming this way. It just stirs me up.

I also like to play football. My friends and I would form a group from our area and go to play with other groups from the Shatila and Sabra area, in a field just outside the camp. But now the place is being developed, and there will be buildings there. We have lost yet another playing field. We don't know where we will play again next time.

Overall, our life now is much better. I can concentrate and study better, and I don't just play around like before. Nobody ever asked me to study hard or do better in my studies before. Now the social workers from BAS always ask my sister to bring me along to join the study group there. My absence was always noticed, and Safiya always had to find me and bring me there. Now I go every time, and my grades are getting better and better. I am proud of myself.

*Safiya:* We are lucky in the sense that we have a lot of loving and caring relatives. They try as much as they can to ensure we have a good life, because we have no parents to take care of us. They see to it that we are in good health, have food to eat and clothes on our back, although they are not wealthy themselves. Each time any one of them goes anywhere, they will come back with a little something for us.

My father's relatives are also good to us. They said that we are growing up like good children, as was our father. We are always invited to go and visit them anytime we want. Although we are not sponsored by BAS, we are still welcome at the centre to join in the activities, games and study groups that are held there for the children of BAS.

*Khaled:* Our cousins are also welcome and sometimes they come with us to play there.

*Safiya:* My mother has a good life now. About a week ago she managed to get a divorce from her husband, and she also found another job in Makassed Hospital, as a cleaning lady for the doctors' rooms, for which she receives a better salary. She goes to work during the day and in the evening when she comes back,

she cleans the stairs and checks the lights in the building where she still stays. Our grandmother, who also lives here in Sabra, takes care of her children while she is at work. Mother has been coming to visit us regularly at grandmother's house because our uncle forbade her to come into his house when she remarried. They knew that he was not a good man, and they advised and tried to talk her out of marrying him, but she went ahead anyway. Sometimes all three of us go and visit her at her place.

*Khaled:* I remember in 1988, during the civil war, a bomb fell near our house. It was sometime during the evening. At that time, I was standing on the roof. Because of the impact of the bomb crashing through the neighbouring building, I fell and hurt my leg very badly. There was so much blood and the pain was so unbearable that I cried very loudly. Our neighbour's house was completely destroyed. My uncle carried me to the hospital, and I was warded for about two weeks. Later, I found out that my cousin Ahmad was also injured in his legs by flying glass shards.

*Safiya:* I don't remember much about the war, but my aunt and my mother are always talking about it, and from them I got a general idea of what happened. But I do remember one time I saw Israeli soldiers come and shoot at helpless people and they kidnapped some. In winter, when we are all sitting around the heater, I love to talk and listen to the history of this tragedy.

*Samar:* The teacher told us about the war with the Israelis, and they told us to ask our grandfather or grandmother to tell us about the Palestine they knew. I know that Palestine was famous for its olive trees.

*Safiya:* We are aware of what is happening now in Palestine. We know that Arafat gained back only a small part of Palestine, while the Israelis still hold most of our land. I would indeed love to live in Palestine. Palestine is for Palestinians, and I wish the Israelis would go back to wherever they came from, so that we could go back to our homeland. I know in Palestine life could only get better. Conditions would be better and cleaner, not like here in Sabra.

*Khaled:* Yes, here we have to trudge along muddied streets, filled with puddles of muddy water, especially in the market area. By the time we reach school, our shoes or boots and pants are all

wet and dirty. This we experience every day, even in summer, but especially so in winter. Sometimes the area is flooded in winter, and we have practically to 'swim' to school. We don't have good winter clothing, because we are poor. We often become sick. My aunt is very good to us. If she feels that the weather is too bad or that we are not well enough to go to school, she will tell us to stay indoors.

*Safiya:* My aunt can make the two of them stay home, but I go to school anyway because I know that I am bigger than them. However, I am always chilled to the bone by the time I arrive at school or when I reach home. But I choose to go to school, anyway. I have only two winter jackets, which I use alternately to save them from becoming too worn out.

I love my aunt and uncle and my cousins very much, but I also love my mother. I hope one day we will all be able to live with her again as one family. I wish I could work now and earn some money and then buy a house so that my mother would not need to work again, but I also wish that I will be able to finish my studies with flying colours and achieve my ambition to become a doctor, or maybe an airline stewardess. I know it takes a lot of work, excellent grades, and also a lot of money, to enter a medical school, but it is dreams and ambition and hopes that keep us going.

## AISHAH HAMID SHAHIN (50 YEARS OLD)

I have eight children, five daughters and three sons. Six of them are already married. I also have one son from a previous marriage, and my husband has two sons from his previous marriage. I don't know what I have done wrong, but my children, whom I cared for until the day they married, have all abandoned me now that they have their own lives to live. Not one of them ever acknowledges me or visits me or helps out the family they left behind. They have conveniently forgotten all of us. Now I live only for my two young sons, Muhammad who is 14 and Ahmad, nine.

My husband is suffering from some form of illness which has left him mentally disturbed. Today he is an invalid and rarely leaves his bed, although from time to time he is aware of what is happening around him. Sometimes he is his normal self, but most of the time he forgets who he is, and often suffers from hysteria, becoming aggressive and self-abusive. His illness came about during the war in 1975, the year Nabatiyya camp in the south was totally wiped out in an Israeli air raid.

My husband was born in Nabatiyya and all his family were there. We lived there after our marriage. During the air raid, it was terrible. People were running and screaming and falling all over. The bombs from the many Israeli fighter planes were being dropped like flies. They fell on the houses, on the streets and on the people fleeing the camp. The noise was deafening. Bodies and blood were everywhere. Some people ran to the mountains. They thought it would be safer there, but on that day no place was safe enough for anyone.

My husband witnessed the death of all his family members, dismembered by bombs. It was a horrible sight. He suffered a massive shock, but it did not set in until we were out of the camp. In the chaos, we managed to escape and made our way to a Lebanese village called Shehim. After the raid was over, my husband suffered agonizing pain in his head, because of the loss of his family. Once in a while he becomes another person, violent and abusive and forgets things, but because his craziness only happens sometimes and not very often, we let it be. He has never once gone to a doctor. No one ever thought of taking him to see one. And when he does not have an attack, he refuses to go because he thinks he is fine. He has not suffered any physical change or harm.

We stayed in Shehim for about seven years. When we were in Nabatiyya, my husband was a cigarette maker. Life was good

then. We had money, we had food, and we were peacefully living the life of refugees. All that vanished with the war. In Shehim, I worked as a cook and a cleaning lady in a school. My husband also worked when he could. During those seven years, three of my older children also did odd jobs instead of going to school. It was wartime; we needed money badly to survive. By 1982, the year we left for Nahr al-Barid, my three younger ones were already in school, and Muhammad was about two years old.

We had managed to save some money, and when we came here, we bought this house. At least we have our own house to live in. I don't know, until today I have not stopped living in suffering. Our situation has not improved; instead my husband's condition is getting worse; my son from my first marriage is out of work and is now staying with us because he has no money or any other place to live and, on top of all of that, my own children have forgotten me.

Now my two stepsons are the only ones supporting this family. We have not enough food. I only receive food rations from UNRWA once every two months, and the ration does not last two months with seven people to feed. One of my stepsons is getting married soon, and we have been adding a new room to the house for him and his wife. The other one is still single; he is a teacher in a kindergarten in Saida in South Lebanon. His salary is about US\$ 70/- a month, and he gives half of it to us.

My mother is also living with us. She is very old and blind, so she really has to be taken care of. I have quit working for sometime now as I'm always sick and my eyesight has become quite bad. So I am totally dependent on my two stepsons, UNRWA rations, and donations from people. I am thankful that my two young sons are being sponsored by Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS) in their children's programme; otherwise I don't know what I would do about their schooling.

Muhammad is in school, but I am a bit worried about Ahmad because he is a very sensitive boy. He is also a bit slow in his understanding of things and can become quickly enraged over little things. If anyone takes anything from him, he just goes berserk and hits himself. I don't know what is wrong with him.

Of course, I know what is happening in Palestine today. I read the papers, and I watch the news, and people here talk about our future, or what we have left of it. I want my homeland back. Living on other people's sympathy is pure hell.

## HIYAM MOHAMMAD TEN AZZOUKA (37 YEARS OLD)

**M**Y family was from Jaffa in Palestine, but I was born in Syria in 1958. By the time I was 13, I was married off, and a year later I was already pregnant with my first child, a girl. My husband was a sailor and he also worked in the port. When the Lebanese civil war started in 1975, he quit his job and managed to do odd jobs like house or building painting, or driving, and many other jobs.

We lived for two years in Said Ghawash, a slum area near the Sports City area in Beirut, and then we moved to Shatila Camp, in the Sabra area. Life was already difficult then. There was no work, food was scarce, and to top it off, during the Israeli invasion in 1982, our house was destroyed, and we had no choice but to live on the street. I was pregnant at that time with my sixth child. Our eldest was only 10 years old and the youngest was about a year old. We managed to find a place in Rouche where we stayed until September 1982. That year I gave birth to a stillborn baby. Throughout the war in Lebanon, we moved around to find safer places; we even went to Tripoli in North Lebanon, to my sister's house, but after that we came back to Said Ghawash.

My husband was 42 years old when he died in 1988. We were all in the house. My husband was working as a taxi driver at that time. There was a knock at the door and one of our daughters went to open it. I was not aware of this then, but she became scared when she saw two policemen at the door. They asked her where her father was. You don't know what it means when a policeman comes to your door and starts asking questions. We were all afraid for my husband, for ourselves, for the whole family. Usually when a Lebanese policeman comes to a house, the men in the house would be taken away, on any kind of pretext, and there was nothing you could do.

My daughter automatically responded by lying that her father was still at work. She was so frightened that she called her uncle living next door. She didn't call me because she was afraid I would go into shock. But I went to the door to find out what was going on. The policemen, on seeing me, told me that there had been an accident involving my husband's car. My husband was dead when they found him. I was so shocked that I collapsed.

It was very difficult for me to accept the fact of his death. I was 29 years old, with seven children — the youngest being only

a year and two months old — with no work and with no home. We were hopelessly lost. For about two months I was still in shock, and I wasn't able to focus on anything. When my husband was alive, he provided us with everything: food, clothing, money, medicine, everything. My job was only to take care of the children and run the house.

At that time and place, everyone had their own problems and nobody could help us but ourselves. We had no food and no money, like most of the Palestinians in Lebanon. My eldest daughter, Hanadi, started working, and Hana worked on a part-time basis to help out. Walid had already dropped out of school years ago because he did not like schooling. Because of this, he is illiterate. He now works on his own as a mechanic in Beirut and goes wherever he is needed.

I have seven children: two sons and five daughters. Hanadi was then 16, Walid 14, Abier 13, Hana 9, Nourhan 7, Mariam 4, and Mohammad, one. Abier, Hana and Nourhan were still in school. In 1991, when she was 16 years old, Abier had to leave school, followed by Hana in 1993 when she was 14 years old. Today, only Nourhan, Mohammad and Mariam are still in school, and they are good in their studies. Hanadi is now married and lives in Bourj al-Barajneh.

I was never able to work because of my weak condition. I suffer from gout that prevents me from standing for long periods. I also have heart problems due to the side effect of an operation. In 1975 when Abier was born, I had a caesarian. In 1988, when I received news about the death of my husband and collapsed, it resulted in problems related to the caesarian stitches, so I had to go through two operations to rectify the problem. Since then I have been suffering a heart problem that sometimes leaves me gasping for breath. I have never been able to work or do any heavy job. My children have had to take the place of their father in bringing home money to support us.

We stayed in Said Ghawash area until recently. In February 1995, we were given an eviction notice by the government as they wanted to clear the area, to make way for a giant development project. They said they were going to build a sports complex over our illegal housing area and everybody had to leave the place. We didn't have enough money to rent a house in any camp (Shatila, Bourj al-Barajneh, Mar Elias) in Beirut, much less in Beirut city. Nor did we have the money to build a house! So, where could we go? We had no choice but to stay put. If a

Palestinian could find a good job that pays well, we would never be faced with this monumental problem. But here Palestinians are not allowed to work professionally even if they have the best qualifications. However, they expect us to pay large sums of money for rent, food and medications on our own. If you stay in an illegal building, you get kicked out. It is as easy as that.

When we received the eviction notice everybody in the area protested. Coincidentally, it was the month of Ramadan and we grabbed at it as an excuse for the government not to kick us out. We made a deal with the government and the police to let us stay on until after 'Id al-Fitr (the celebration at the end of the month of Ramadan). At least it would give us time to find new places to stay. The government relented. Right after 'Id al-Fitr, the government served us with a 15-day notice to clear the area. We had no choice but to leave.

Ever since we received the eviction notice, I have gone out every day in search of an affordable house, if possible near the al-Rawas area, where the children go to school. At least we would be able to save some money on transport. But until today, I am still searching. The area which was known as Said Ghawash is today no more.

I received a sum of US\$10,500/- as compensation, because I have a big family. To build a house in Beirut you need more than US\$15,000/-. At the moment we are renting in this building which costs us US\$400/- a month. At this rate, the money will not last long. We need the money to ensure the family will survive. Abier and Hana are still without permanent jobs, and three of their siblings are still in school. Abier had to stop working because in 1993 she had a bad fall and suffered a dislocated shoulder. She refused to have an operation for two reasons: because she was scared and also because we had no money then to pay for the operation. As a result, her hand is weak. She still experiences pain if she tries to lift anything, even just a stack of books. She is trying to get a job where she won't be required to do heavy or strenuous work with her hands, but it is almost impossible for a Palestinian girl to have an office job.

The institution of Bait Atfal as-Samoud helps us a lot. Nourhan, Mariam and Mohammad are all sponsored through the institution's children's programme. I don't know what I am going to do next. I hope I will be able to find a house soon. Maybe then I will be able to plan for the future.

I don't know anything about Palestine. I only know that my parents came from Jaffa and that my husband's family came from Gaza. I don't understand the peace treaty, but I feel that it is not for us Palestinians in Lebanon. Our problems are now more difficult; even for graduates there is no work. Palestinians cannot earn good money; we are treated as aliens here and now UNRWA — UN Relief and Works Agency — is gradually cutting back on free schools, hospitalization, and food rations, citing financial shortages. Everything is changing in Lebanon, and we are also changing from bad to worse.

## WADAD ABDUL HALIM (17 YEARS OLD)

ONE day during Ramadan in 1985, Shatila came under heavy attack. My father, upon hearing the commotion, bundled us up and put us into the car. I was only seven years old then. I didn't understand what was happening, but I was scared. Father took us to the Biqa'a valley, which is about 50 km. away in the countryside, where my grandmother lived. We stayed in the Biqa'a valley for about six months. After leaving us there, my father went back to our house in Shatila and stayed there with Said, my eldest brother, who was then only 20 years old.

Three weeks after he left us, I overheard my uncle telling other people that my father was dead. I remember crying when I heard the news. Although I was still a small child, you know, all the time someone around us was dead or dying, so I knew the meaning of the word 'dead'. My mother then went back to Shatila to get my brother and took him to stay with her sister-in-law in Fakhani Street in Beirut. Six months later, we all went back to Beirut because Said wanted to remain there, and my mother wanted to be with him. In Fakhani Street, I went to the UNRWA school, that is whenever we could, whenever the fighting stopped, and we could go out on the street. Fortunately, the school was just around the block.

When we were in Shatila, we stayed in a very small house, one small room with a kitchen and a bathroom. It was destroyed during the war. In Fakhani Street, there were altogether 12 of us living in the two-room house: one room for us, and the other for my uncle's family. I have four brothers and three sisters, plus my mother, nine persons staying in that one room. Life was difficult because we were two families living as one. Those days, we never had enough to eat. It was worse during winter. However, we were lucky that at least we still had warm clothes to protect us from the cold. When we left Shatila for the Biqa'a, my mother thoughtfully also packed our winter clothing.

My aunt worked as a cleaning lady in Hilal Hospital. She was the only one earning money then. My uncle, who was working outside Lebanon, also sent us some money now and then. I have a brother, Khaled, now 25, who is handicapped because of some disease he suffered immediately after birth. He was left paralysed, so he cannot walk or do anything by himself. We have to carry him everywhere and also feed and dress him.

He cannot talk, but he can hear and understand what is being said. And if he sees something funny, he will smile and laugh like everybody else.

To add to our misery, the Amal militia was always making house searches. They just entered any house and started rummaging for men, weapons, valuables and jewellery. They would shoot at random and recklessly inside the house, breaking and destroying furniture, television sets, sofas, window-panes, everything. The most scary thing was when they did find the person they were looking for, they would take the person outside the house and shoot him right there and then, in front of the family members.

They came to our house a few times, but when they saw Khaled and found no other man in the house they left without taking anything, but not before shooting at the furniture and sofa. I was always very scared when these people came to our place. My brothers and I used to crawl under the bed in our room, crying. Each time the soldiers came into the room, we thought we were going to die. It was a nightmare.

About six years ago, when I was about 11 years old, my aunt's brother who was living in Vienna sent word that he wanted back the house in which we were staying. You see, my aunt and her family, like ourselves, were just temporary lodgers. We had nowhere to go, but we had to move out. So my mother went around searching for a place, and in the end she found this room. So here we are now, living in this terrible building we call home. But I like it here rather than in Fakhani Street. At least here we have some privacy, as one family. I mean, how could anyone have any privacy when you are a family of eight living in one small room?

When we first moved here, there was no bathroom as it had been destroyed, and we did not have a kitchen, either. Slowly, we rebuilt the bathroom and made a makeshift kitchen. As you can see, this is our home now. My eldest brother Said went to Sweden in 1990 in the hope of starting a new life, but then, hoping and realizing the hope are two different things. Till today he has not found any work, and he is leading a risky life as an illegal immigrant. But at least he still manages to keep in touch with us.

My parents came from Palestine, a place called Alma, near Safad. They were very small when they and their respective families joined the exodus, so they were not able to tell me much

about their birthplace, our hometown. I do want to know more about Palestine, but here in Lebanon it is very difficult to get any information. What we know we learned from Bait Atfal as-Samoud (BAS) through its education programme and also from the stories of elderly people in the camps.

Today I still go to the same school, and I am proud to say I am doing quite well in my studies. My best subjects are Mathematics and English. I want to be a dentist, but I don't know if it is possible as we don't have the money. And even if we had the funds, and I managed to pass, it would all be a waste, because the situation here in Lebanon does not permit a Palestinian to work. I know many Palestinian graduates in professional fields who have ended up doing clerical and menial work or remain unemployed.

My mother is working as a cleaner and goes out to work from 7.00 every morning till 3.00 in the afternoon. She is the only one working in the family, after Said left for Sweden. My two older sisters are married, and have their own families. That leaves me, my two small brothers, and Khaled. Luckily, my brothers and I are sponsored through the BAS childrens' programme. Our sponsors are from Finland, and the monthly allowance they send is like a godsend to help pay for our education and basic needs.

I want to live like other people who have their own house, land and country, but not here in Lebanon. Here we are nothing. We have nothing.

## SAJEDAH HUSSEIN (30 YEARS OLD)

FIRST, I am going to tell you the story of my father. His name was Mohamad Abdellatif Hussein, and he was born in a mountain village called Faradah in Palestine. Like most people in Palestine during that era, my father was a farmer, like his father before him. He was married there to my mother, Fatoum, and in 1943 my sister Souraya was born and four years later, my brother Jamal.

The exodus of 1948 changed their lives forever. My father and his family had to move out. They stayed in South Lebanon for about nine months before moving to Baalbak in the Biqa'a valley, in East Lebanon. They settled in Wavell Camp — disused military barracks — and began their life anew. My father started working as a labourer, doing any kind of work he could find. The pay was low, hardly enough to support his family, which was beginning to grow. My brother Abdel Kader was born in 1950, Mahmoud in 1952 and Abdel Nasser in 1960. I was born in 1965.

In 1970, we received the first among many pieces of bad news that seem to pour into our midst. My brother Mahmoud, who was just 18 years old, had died. He had joined the armed resistance in South Lebanon and was killed during a mission. My father was heartbroken. Both my parents were, so much so that they couldn't stand to live in the camp anymore because of the memory of Mahmoud. In 1973, my father decided that we should move to Tal al-Za'atar, a camp in East Beirut.

For three years we stayed in that camp, the family starting over again, little knowing the fate that awaited us in that unfortunate camp. Tal al-Za'atar was among the first of many Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon to be totally destroyed. The last two years were very difficult. Fighting was picking up, we had to face siege after siege, sometimes for a short period and sometimes for months. For almost a year we suffered, living under the last siege, completely surrounded. Nobody could come in and nobody could go out. The situation was critical. Anyone who was able, man or woman, was expected to fight together against the enemy. Water was scarce, and there was absolutely no food. My mother died while she was getting water from the well. I think by now you must know of the suicide missions of people trying to get water from the only source of water in the camp. My brother Abdel Kader was killed during the fighting,

while Abdel Nasser was taken prisoner. Until today we do not know what happened to him, whether he is still alive or dead. We lost about 150 members of our family in the siege of Tal al-Za'atar.

My father survived. Souraya and I also survived. When the camp fell in August 1976, we were taken out by an International Red Cross truck to a place called Mathaf. My father sent my sister and me to live with our uncle in Ain al-Hilwih in South Lebanon, where we stayed for about six months. Then my father took us to Damour, a village on the coast near Beirut. We stayed there for six years.

Damour was a different story altogether. All I remember is that it was a horrible life. We lived in a box of a house with no door or window, just an opening. My father tried to make do with what we had. He was now a member of the Fatah group. I was about 11 or 12 years old then, very upset with life. We had no electricity and no running water. It certainly upset me more and also made me mad when my father decided to marry again. His choice was an Egyptian woman. But the marriage collapsed after a few years when, a week after giving birth to my sister Fida'a in 1979, she left without a word.

My father did not know what to do, so my uncle asked for help from Bait Aftal as-Samoud (BAS) in Bir Hassan. Fida'a was sent to the BAS foster home in Nahr al-Barid in the north. We heard that she was evacuated to Tunisia with the other kids during the Israeli invasion in 1982. That was the last we heard about her until a few years ago. Shortly afterwards, my father married again. His third wife, Myriam, bore him six girls; Nisrine in 1979, Yasmine in 1981, Sabrine in 1982, Rasha in 1985, Iyman in 1986 and Samar in 1987. When the Israelis devastated the region in 1982, my father took his family to Baalbak and then to Badawi Camp in North Lebanon, to settle down again.

During this time I worked as a social worker with a committee called the Freedom and Resistance Committee to help out people and to educate the children as best as we could. In 1983, I was given a passport to travel to Tunisia, and I worked with the Red Cross there for three years. It was there that I managed to find out the whereabouts of my sister Fida'a. She is now living in Gaza. I talked to her through the Red Cross line in 1984, and also wrote letters to her. When I got back, I continued my work with the Red Cross, and we are trying to get Fida'a into Lebanon to stay with us, but I don't know if it will be possible.

During the second Israeli invasion in 1982, I was in Beirut. I lived with my married sister and opened a school in a rented house in the city. We were lucky to escape unhurt during the war, but it totally ravaged the city, and we had to start from scratch once again. However, it was not to be my destiny to remain in Beirut. In 1987, my father died of stomach cancer. During his life, he had always taught us children to do good, to be kind and just; therefore I felt it was my duty to take his place when he was gone.

It seems that there were problems with my family when my stepmother started working to support herself and the children. She worked long hours in the field, leaving the small children unattended, for there was no one to care for them. The house was a mess and although the BAS people, who had helped three of my sisters to be sponsored through their children's programme, tried to help, Myriam was unable to co-operate. Things were made worse when my father's relatives butted in. They had a big fight and Myriam decided to quit and left the house and her children. That was in June 1993.

I had to take care of my sisters, for now they had no one. I don't regret my decision one bit. I find the children very good-natured and now they are doing something to better themselves. I encourage them to finish their studies, but I cannot force them to do so. The older two, Nisrine and Yasmine, left school but they are now working and learning some skills, as well as helping out with the family expenditure. The others are all still in school, and I hope they will be able to finish and find good jobs in future.

We have very high hopes and trust in God. It has been written that the Palestinians must go on a crusade from the day they are born till the day they breathe their last breath. Our issue is not just one major issue, but, most importantly, it is a religious issue. Our ambition is to live in a country that is not under anyone's rule but our own. We are responsible for the children of today to realize this ambition, and to tell them how important it is to love and honour their country and their people.



## VIGNETTES OF THE CAMP by Dolly Fong

### FADI

**F**ADI is a 14-year-old boy. He lives with his 12-year-old sister and their widowed mother. His father was killed in 1976 during the civil war, before his younger sister was born. When I met Fadi, he had fought in five different wars, two in 1985, two in 1986, and lastly in 1987. He had been injured but, Alhamdulillah, he survived. He took me to the cemetery to see the graves of his two brothers; they were 17 and 19 when they were killed. He showed me the bombed-out Samad factory where they dug tunnels and stayed in them for six months, eating grass while the camp was under siege; even pulling up grass risked the bombs and snipers' bullets. "I tied a piece of cloth 'round my stomach when I had hunger pains." He had a moon-face from malnutrition to the point of starvation.

Fadi has a sad memory of our clinic; we sat on the steps as he told me the story. "Right here," he pointed to the ground. "This soil is soaked with the blood dripping from my brother's head, he was sniped near our house, blood dripped all the way from our house to here"; his house is about ten houses away. "Just as we reached the steps here, my brother died. He was only 17."

One night in April this year, at 4.00 in the morning, after several hours of shelling, we sat on the steps talking, enjoying the peacefulness and fresh air. He sat on the ground, the soil soaked with his brother's blood. "Why don't you go home, Dolly?" "We are having another bad war, bad one". "This time it could be me." He held up his head looking into the sky, at the same time watching me from the corner of his eye, waiting for my answer and reassurance to stave off his fear or doubt. "Well, only Allah knows when any one is going to die, only He decides." My answer did not please him at all, I thought. He asked for two Panadol and a cigarette and wandered off in the dark.

Fadi was injured again during the latest war, in May 1988. Thank God it was not serious.

## UMM MUHAMMED

UMM Muhammed is a sweet old lady. She lives outside the camp in the Haret Huriiek area, though she comes into the camp quite often whenever she is in need of medicines. During the mid-April to mid-May Ramadan, she called at the clinic several times to take me to her house to break the fast. I wished I could go, but it was just impossible. At that time we were coping with increasing emergencies, especially as Haifa Hospital at the other end of the camp was more or less non-functioning. In the first two weeks of May, Umm Muhammed had her granddaughter bring me loaves of bread, as she knew we were running out of food. This old mother was famous for smuggling food into the camp during the siege, though she was lucky, she was not gunned down like other women. She tied bundles of food 'round her legs, covered by her long gown. She walked into the camp through the armed enemy check-point and along a stretch of deserted lane to reach the cluster of camp houses. Once she was caught smuggling cooking oil in shampoo bottles. *Haram*, they had her empty the oil onto the earth.

Before I left Lebanon, I met Umm Muhammad outside in Hamra. She hugged me in her arms and she sobbed and sobbed. "Does your family know what is happening here?" she asked. "Habibi Allah", she kept repeating. "Did you get the bread I sent you?", she went on in between her sobs.

I did not get a chance to eat a meal at her house after all. I was just too upset; perhaps when I return this time, I will break bread with her. God bless her, really.

## OF BULLETS AND BOTTOMS

WE are lucky the windows of our clinic did not get blown during the war. The windows have two sets of shutters, glass and metal. During heavy bombing and shelling, the glass panels had to be opened in case of an explosion. The metal shutters had to be shut. At least they gave some measure of protection. But bad luck, none of the latches could secure the shutters. Every time a bomb exploded near us, the vibration would blow the shutters wide open. We had to dash to close the shutters after each explosion. It seemed rather silly, sitting on the floor and dashing to catch the shutters as they were flung open.

While the shelling was on, patients rushed to the clinic were laid on the floor, as shrapnel and bullets can fly through the windows. We squatted on the floor, among the patients, with all our instruments, lotions, and medicines. Every time a bomb exploded, somebody from behind would push us onto the floor, over the patients' bodies, knocking over lotions and instruments. And still we went on making incisions, removing shrapnel from patients' arms, legs, faces and necks.

It did not dawn on us until somebody came in with multiple shrapnel on his back and buttocks; this patient was clever to duck on his abdomen, instead of getting more severe injuries on the front of the body! We joked among ourselves after we finished treating that patient. How awful if all of us were to get shrapnel in our bottoms as we ducked on the floor, with our bottoms in the air! We might have to treat each other's bottoms every day, before attending to patients! Ever since that incident we were conscious not to duck on the floor. We did not relish seeing one another's bottoms!

## THE SWEETNESS OF GRAPES

OUR immediate next-door neighbour lives in a bombed-out one-storey house, with a flat roof. Within the walls there is a patch of soil where they grow a mulberry tree and some grapevines. After the icy cold winter, the grapevines grow vigorously in spring. The vines grow up the mulberry tree and along the clothesline. What a shame, there was nobody to tend to the vines.

Ahmad and I thought we could give the grapevine a new home, and so we did. He jumped over to Umm Ahmad's roof on the pretext that he dropped a milk tin from our second-storey roof. He untangled the vines from the mulberry tree, while I hung myself out over the edge of our roof, pulling up the vines, which grew longer and longer as I pulled! I tied yards of strings to poles and fixed them through the bullet holes in the wall.

Slowly, the grapevines found a new home. It would be good for shade in the hot summer. The vine leaves would be cooked as food, but not the grapes. Umm Ahmad came back one day and discovered her grapevine had climbed over to our clinic. Ahmad and I reassured her we only wanted the vines to admire, and we promised not to eat the grapes!

The vine grew so well in April and May. We used to wait for days to get up to the roof, manoeuvring ourselves carefully behind a piece of concrete, so as not to be seen from the *dushka* (rocket-launching pad). Ahmad jumped down ten feet onto Umm Ahmad's roof, untangled more vines, and there I pulled, leaning across the wall; now bunches of grapes hang from the vines. We broke our promise. We had not seen any fresh fruit or vegetables for weeks.

## LOOKING THROUGH A MULBERRY TREE

**I**BU Alijah showed me a picture she adores taken from the window of a hotel in the mountains of Lebanon.

I always think of the kitchen window upstairs, above the clinic. In front of the window is the mulberry tree of our neighbour, which shielded us from a five-storey building occupied by Amal. Behind the leaves of the mulberry tree, we would peep at Amal putting up more sandbags on the roof of that building. By 1<sup>st</sup> October last year, they built a new *dushka* — rocket-launch — behind the barricades.

In the evenings, we tried our hand at turning the lunch we saved from the hospital into something to please ourselves. Susie Weighton had learned to make quite tasty fried rice with goat cheese. Every time a gunshot went off, we ducked our heads, remembering the bullet holes on the wall behind us. If the shooting went on longer, we tired of ducking our heads and would sit on the floor and carry on cooking. Every time they shot, we shouted *iskut!* Shut up!

In the winter, the mulberry leaves turn brown, and they drop, leaving the trunk and branches bare. Without the leaves, I could only see the rubble piled up on my neighbours' roof-tops. Three houses beyond our clinic is the main street. Across the street is the yellow building of Amal, less than the length of a basketball field away. Behind the flats, we could see the Lebanese mountains. At night, the whole mountain is covered with twinkling lights; below the blocks of flats, cars move around. It is a totally different world inside and outside this window, two different worlds without any fence or border. All are human beings, but of different fates. Aren't we created by the same God, who created all human beings? Or to be more 'scientific', are we not from the same source of origin? But who created the differences?

## THE MUEZZIN

TO many non-Muslims, the Muezzin calling the faithful for prayer can appear to be irritating. I had that kind of attitude before, until one night sometime in April 1988. It started with lighter guns, then machine-guns, hand-grenades, mortars and rockets. Before the shelling got heavy, women and older men walked 'round the camp pleading to stop the bloodshed, but they did not succeed. Then came the call from the Masjid: "*Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim*, in the name of God, stop fighting ...", the voice got more desperate as the shelling became heavier, yet the shelling and bombing carried on through the night. I felt so sad and annoyed, what a ruthless world, the injustice, the suffering the Palestinians are going through.

I sat under the medicine shelf; bottles of cough syrup clinking away from the vibrations. All the light bulbs cracked; pieces of glass scattered on the floor. I searched around the floor with a candle, trying to pick up the broken glass.

Then at dawn came the Muezzin ... the morning prayer, the voice weak from the loud speaker breaking through the noise of bombs and gunshots. Suddenly, I began to feel I understood the prayer, it brought tranquillity to the state of my mind during that time.

I put a mattress under the medicine shelf; a naughty mouse ran over my body, under my clothes. A leech-like looking creature crawled out from cracks in the floor towards my mattress. I left the door open, with a candle and some Panadol on the table, in case someone wanted to help themselves, and I went to sleep.

Many nights since then, I have sat on the floor, waiting for the morning prayer. It seems to have some sort of power over my soul, it eases the tension, especially during long hours of shelling.

*Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim* ... Siham and I would say these words as we ran over the rubble, along the winding alleys to see patients from one corner of the camp to another.

## LEBANON: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A conference of representatives of the European powers that had signed the Treaty of Paris following the Crimean War (1856) — among them the Ottoman state, now a member of the so-called Concert of Europe — was convened in Beirut on French initiative to consider the reorganization of Mount Lebanon. The outcome, the *Règlement Organique* of 1861 (revised in 1864), established Mount Lebanon as a *mutessarrifate*, or privileged *sanjak* (administrative region) of the Ottoman empire, internationally guaranteed, under an Ottoman Christian governor called a Mutesarrif who was appointed and sent from Istanbul with the approval of the guaranteeing European powers. The Mutesarrifate remained operative in Mount Lebanon until 1915, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War (1914–1918). It provided the mountain with orderly government, under which considerable advances were made in social development.

After the collapse of the Ottoman empire in 1918 following its defeat in the war, the British and the French divided the Syrian provinces as mandates between them, with the present territory of Lebanon being part of the French mandate. In response to pressure from their Maronite friends, in 1920 the French annexed different parts of the former *vilayets* (or Ottoman provinces) of Beirut and Damascus to the territory of the old Lebanese Mutesarrifate, and so created the State of Greater Lebanon within its present frontiers. In 1926, the State of Greater Lebanon was reconstituted as the Lebanese Republic.

Notwithstanding that this state included large swaths of Syrian territory with Muslim majorities, the Maronites in Lebanon were determined to maintain their own paramount control of the state and were fundamentally unwilling to have Christians and Muslims share in the country as political equals.

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Excerpted from Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions* (London: I.B. Tauris, repr. 1989) 13, 16, 36, 37.

The Christian-dominated Lebanese state was also unable to come to reasonable terms with 'Arab nationalism. Thus 'Arabism stood face to face with an exclusive parochial social force called 'Lebanism', and the two forces collided on every fundamental issue, impeding the normal development of the state.

The strategic split was manifest as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the Crusaders arrived in Syria and the main body of the Maronites in northern Mount Lebanon rallied around them. Meanwhile, in southern Mount Lebanon, the Druzes of the Gharb region, which overlooks Beirut, coalesced around the Sunni Muslim *atabegs* of Damascus.

## FACTS: PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON

ONLY those Palestinian refugees who took direct refuge in Lebanon in the wake of the 1947–1949 exodus are considered legal residents. These ‘legal’ Palestinian refugees have been granted the Refugee Documents (RDs) provided for by the ‘Arab League, which confer permanent residency rights. From September 1995, Palestinian RD holders were required to obtain visas for exit and entry, a restriction which was lifted in early 1999. In 1969, the 1948 refugees who did not register with UNRWA — either for personal reasons or because of the specific requirements of its definition — obtained a residency card and a travel document (*laissez passer*) valid for one year and renewable. Palestinians who immigrated to Lebanon after the War of 1967, or after the 1970–1971 PLO-Jordanian dispute, have not been granted identity papers and have thus been under constant threat of deportation.

Areas of employment closed to Palestinians (as foreigners) range from barbering to most of the liberal professions (about 70 specified jobs). Other work areas require a work permit (without right to social benefits) and include the most menial and low-paid sectors, such as construction and sanitation, textile and carpet works, leather works, domestic labour, nursing, automotive repair and cleaning. In December 1992, new regulations further limited employment options available to Palestinians, resulting in a large number of Palestinians working illegally or in the informal sector.

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Source: *The Palestinian Refugees Fact File* (PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, April 2000) reprinted in *Tanmiya* (July 2000).

## CHRONOLOGY OF MAIN HISTORICAL EVENTS

**P**ALESTINE is situated in what has been termed the Fertile Crescent, an area extending over today's Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Occupied West Bank and Gaza. Due to its abundance of fertile land and its geographically important position as a communication link between Africa and Asia, Palestine has been conquered some thirty times in its 5,000-year history.

The people of Canaan were a nomadic tribe who came to Palestine from the desert several thousand years before Christ, and were probably the first people to inhabit the area. They called their country 'Canaan'. The word 'Palestine' was coined by the Greeks and means 'the country of the Philistines', a people who conquered the coastal area of Canaan around 1400 BC. They called their country 'Philistia'. The 'Arabic name for Palestine is 'Filestin'. Palestine came under 'Arab rule and, like Jordan and Lebanon comprised part of Greater Syria. A substantial part of Palestine was rechristened 'Israel' in 1948 when immigrating European Jews proclaimed their own state therein after the UN voted to partition mandated Palestine between Palestinian 'Arabs and Jews.

BC

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2800 | Egyptian Pharaohs invade Canaan. Thousands of her inhabitants are taken to Egypt as slaves.  |
| 1850 | Lack of food makes the Hebrews leave their home of Ur (in today's Iraq) and emigrate to Canaan. Their leader was Abraham. The Hebrews have <i>one</i> God only. Their religion is Judaism. |
| 1400 | Arameans and Philistines immigrate to Canaan. The various tribes make war on one another for centuries.  |
| 1004 | The Hebrews secure political control of most of Canaan under their kings David and Solomon.  |

Their kingdom is called Israel. Their capital is Jerusalem.

- 930 Barely 70 years after its formation, the Hebrew kingdom is divided into two — Judaea and Samaria — which are later conquered successively by Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally Romans.

AD

- 70 After a Jewish rebellion in the Roman province of Palestine, the Romans destroy Jerusalem and forbid the Jews to enter. The Jews are taken captive and sent off to Rome, others emigrate to different parts of Europe and North Africa. Some stay in Palestine and other parts of the Middle East.

- 630 An army led by Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah and of Islam, conquers the city of Makka on the 'Arabiyan peninsula, today's Saudi Arabia. The 'Arabs are converted to Islam.

- 636 The 'Arabs conquer the rest of the Middle East and march on to Turkey and North Africa. The Qur'an is compiled.

- 1099–1187 European Christian Crusaders occupy Palestine but under the leadership of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, a Kurd, are driven out by the 'Arabs 88 years later.

- 1516 The Ottomans from Turkey conquer the whole of the Middle East, including Palestine. The Ottomans control the area for 400 years.

19<sup>th</sup>

- Century Jews are persecuted in Europe. Small groups of European Jews begin to emigrate to Palestine where they assimilate with the 'Arab population and find a sanctuary to practise their religion. As European colonialism conquers almost the entire world, Zionism is created, a political movement claiming that all Jews have an *exclusive* Biblical right to Palestine.

At the same time, the Ottoman rule of Palestine and the Middle East became weaker. A French-British consortium builds the Suez Canal through Egypt. The Canal is opened in 1869. It becomes an important

short cut to French and British colonies, important enough for England to incorporate Egypt in her Empire in 1882. The Suez Canal and the important strategic position of the Middle East makes the area indispensable to the colonialists.

In 1896 Theodor Herzl, one of the founders of Zionism, writes his book, *The Jewish State*, where he advocates the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The following year the Zionist movement holds its first congress in Basle, Switzerland. The Zionists start to organize large-scale emigration of Jews to Palestine.

1908 The first oil in the Middle East is found by Britons in Iran.

1914–16 The First World War breaks out. The Ottomans in Turkey anxiously watch the increased influence of Britain and France in the Middle East and ally themselves with Germany.

The Zionists turn to Britain and suggest that it should support Jewish immigration to Palestine in exchange for the promise that a future Jewish state would protect British interests in the Suez Canal.

At the same time Britain promises the 'Arabs independence if they rise against the Ottomans. The 'Arabs start a rebellion.

In the meantime, Britain and France meet secretly and plan a division of the Middle East in anticipation of their defeating the Ottomans.

1917 *The Balfour Declaration*, 2 November: The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, expresses the support of the British Government for the formation of 'a national home for Jews in Palestine'. The 'Arabs protest. Britain placates them by promising that "Jewish settlement in Palestine would only be allowed in so far as would be consistent with the political and economic freedom of the 'Arab population". 2 November has become a day of national mourning for the Palestinians.

1918 The 'Arabs liberate Damascus from Ottoman rule, but in spite of earlier promises of 'Arab independence,

Britain takes over control of Damascus a month later. Britain, France and the US win the First World War.

1920–39 The League of Nations is formed with an obvious European majority among member states. The League gives France a mandate over Syria, whilst Britain is given 'Iraq, Jordan and Palestine. 'Mandate' simply means that Britain and France administer these areas as *de facto* colonies. 1 September 1920, France creates Greater Lebanon including Mount Lebanon and parts of Syria.

With the approval of the British, the Zionists start a massive emigration of European Jews to Palestine. Between 1919 and 1936, Palestine's Jewish population grows from 58,000 to 348,000. In the same period the 'Arab population of Palestine grows from 642,000 to 978,000. The Zionists form the Jewish National Fund to buy up land in Palestine but manage to increase their share of the land by only 5.6%.

The Palestinians object to the mounting Zionist immigration, but Britain does not react. Palestine proclaims a national strike in 1936 to protest Zionist immigration. The strike soon turns into an armed rebellion against the British. Together with the Zionists, the British put down the rebellion in 1939.

1943 Independence of Lebanon: Power distributed according to presumed numerical strength of religious communities. Christian pre-eminence assured as ratio of six Christian deputies to every five Muslim deputies in Parliament. President would be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'a Muslim, and so on, i.e. a confessionalist structure or confederation of protonational communities. Senior officers of Lebanese army mostly Christian.

1939–45 The Second World War breaks out. In Palestine the British make a U-turn and suddenly try to limit Zionist immigration in order to stop the 'Arabs from supporting Germany. The Zionists organize illegal immigration and openly oppose the British.

In Europe Hitler begins the extermination of the Jews. Millions of Jews are murdered before Nazi Germany is defeated. More than 200,000 Jews manage to emigrate to Palestine under the Zionist programme.

The UN is formed.

Syria, Lebanon and Jordan become independent, but *not* Palestine.

1946 Violent clashes between Zionists and Palestinians. Britain loses control of the situation and leaves the responsibility of Palestine with the UN.

1947 UN Partition Resolution divides mandated Palestine between Zionist-Jews and Palestinians. The Palestinians reject the division of their country. The Zionists prepare for the introduction of partition and begin a terrorist campaign against the Palestinians to make them flee.

1948 British troops leave Palestine. Zionists proclaim the Jewish State of Israel. The 'Arab states send in armies against the new state. 800,000 Palestinians flee before the advancing Israelis. The 'Arab armies are forced to retreat, only managing to retain the West Bank of Palestine and Gaza. Jordan annexes the West Bank and Egypt takes over the administration of Gaza.

1949 Israel is accepted as a member state of the UN. At the same time, the UN instructs Israel to let the Palestinians return but Israel refuses. The Palestinians end up in refugee camps run by UNRWA (United Nations Relief & Works Agency) in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians do not build up any resistance movement but become apathetic, waiting for the 'Arab armies to liberate Palestine.

1956 Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal. Israel, Britain and France invade Egypt. The Soviet Union threatens to bomb Paris and London. The US forces the invaders to withdraw.

A group of Palestinian students — one of them Yassir Arafat — decide to take matters into their

own hands and form a Palestinian resistance movement: al-Fatah ('the opening').

- 1958      8 May: the first Lebanese Civil War begins; ends 14 October.
- 1964      The League of 'Arab states forms the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Fatah stays outside because they consider that PLO is too much under the influence of the 'Arab states.
- 1965      1 January: Fatah stages its first guerrilla operation inside Israel.
- 1967      *The June War*: The 'Arab armies are vanquished. In six days, Israel trebles her territory by occupying the Sinai peninsula in Egypt, the Jowlan (Golan) Heights in Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. Now all of Palestine is occupied. Four hundred and sixteen thousand new refugees from the West Bank and Gaza flee to Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. The superpowers — the US and the USSR — start a diplomatic offensive to get the 'Arab states to recognize Israel in return for Israel withdrawing from the occupied areas. *Not a word is mentioned about the national rights of the Palestinians.*
- 1968–69      Cairo Accord legitimizes Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon and use of part of the south as spring-board for attacks into Israel.
- The military void after the defeat of the 'Arab armies in the June War is soon filled by Fatah. Several other commando groups, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front, are formed. In 1969, the commando groups take over PLO and Fatah leader Yassir Arafat is elected PLO Chairman. Guerrilla bases are also set up in Jordan.
- 21 March 1968: Battle of Karameh — Palestinian guerrilla groups in Jordan successfully defeat Israeli forces.
- The PLO takes over the control of refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan.
- December 1968: Israeli raid on Beirut airport; beginning of conflict in Lebanon over Palestinian issue.

- 1970–71 *Black September*: The numerous guerrilla operations of PLO from Jordan, Israel's revenge actions against guerrilla bases and Jordanian villages, the hijacking of four airplanes to Jordan, and the increasing military strength of PLO, lead to a direct confrontation between the liberation movement and King Hussein of Jordan. After many battles and the massacre of thousands of Palestinians, Hussein's army manages to drive the liberation movement out of Jordan in September 1971. PLO moves its headquarters from Jordan to Lebanon. Continuing guerrilla attacks against Israel lead to Israeli air raids against South Lebanon.
- Egypt's President Nasser dies. Sadat takes over.
- 1973 *The October War*: The Middle East peace initiative of the great powers peters out because Israel refuses to compromise. To break the deadlock, Egypt and Syria start an offensive against Israel's forces in Sinai and Jowlan (Golan). 'Arab oil embargo. New peace negotiations start.
- 1974 PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat addresses the UN General Assembly. A majority of the countries of the world — 105 states — recognize PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. At the same time, the UN acknowledges the Palestinians' *right to a home country of their own*.
- 1975 Numerous guerrilla operations from South Lebanon prompt Israel to start intensive bombing campaigns against the Palestinian refugee camps in the area. They also attack Lebanese villages to force the population to flee. Zionists maintain that South Lebanon also belongs to the Jewish state, sometimes referred to as the 'North Bank' of Israel. IDF rabbis issue leaflets with towns and villages in Lebanon only designated by ancient Hebrew names. Beirut is *Be'erot* (wells) and Lebanon is described as 'the property of the tribe of Asher'.<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Ha'aretz*, 26 July 1982.

13 April: right-wing Christian Phalange massacre busload of Palestinians and some Lebanese. Lebanese Civil War begins. The Lebanese right-wing forces move to clear all areas of East Beirut and the north of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Palestinian Resistance.

The UN condemns Zionism as racism.

Egypt under Sadat and Israel sign second Interim Agreement; Abu Rudeis oilfields restored to Egyptian control.

1976

Right-wing Lebanese Front moves in strength against the last Muslim, Palestinian, and refractory Christian areas in East Beirut: the Palestinian camps, Dbayyeh (fell 14 January); Jisr al-Basha (of about 2,000 Christians) and Tal al-Za'atar (30,000 Palestinians and Lebanese, fell 12 August); the Shi'a slum districts of Maslakh and Karantina (fell 18 January), the Shi'a suburb of Nabaa (fell 6 August), and the small Armenian Christian quarter of Badawi. LNM and Palestinian forces — known as 'Joint Forces' — retaliate by capturing coastal town of Damour; Maronite Christian inhabitants evicted.

Middle January: Lebanese army breaks apart. Army units opposed to complicity of the Army Command with right-wing Christian forces withdraw from the army and form the Lebanese Arab Army under the command of Lt. Ahmad Khatib.

June: Joint Forces on verge of defeating right-wing Lebanese Front when Syrian army enters Lebanon at invitation of Lebanese President Suleiman Franjieh. Triumph of popular, progressive movement stymied. Syria first attacks LNM/PLO coalition, two years later fights right-wing Maronite coalition.

1977

16 March: Kamal Jumblatt, LNM leader, assassinated.

19 November: Egypt's President, Anwar Sadat, travels to Jerusalem to start peace negotiations. His visit condemned by the 'Arab League, in particular by PLO.

- 1978 March: Israel invades South Lebanon, 2,000 civilians die and 200,000 made refugees; six villages destroyed and 82 damaged. Israel is forced to retreat, but establishes a 10 km. deep 'buffer zone' — 'Free Lebanon' — on Lebanese territory.
- 1979 A final peace treaty is signed between Israel and Egypt. Israel to return Sinai to Egypt; transfer completed 1982. While Egypt and Israel negotiating, Israeli air force bombing Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Egypt expelled from 'Arab League'.  
Lebanese right-wing forces supported by Israel proclaim their own state in parts of South Lebanon.
- 1980 'Iraq invades Iran, beginning of Gulf War.
- 1981 Israeli bombers attack and destroy a nuclear reactor in Baghdad, 'Iraq.  
Three hundred people are killed and 800 wounded in Israeli air raid on civilian area of Beirut. Israeli forces systematically destroy the bridges across the Litani River. American diplomat negotiates a cease-fire on Lebanon-Israel border.  
December: Israel illegally annexes Syrian Jowlan (Golan) Heights.
- 1982 June: assassination attempt on Israeli ambassador to London by radical anti-PLO Palestinian group, pretext for Israeli invasion of Lebanon (sixth Israel-'Arab War); three-month siege of Beirut; evacuation of PLO and Syrian forces from Beirut.  
14 September: assassination of Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel coincidentally(?) after his refusal to conclude a Peace Treaty with Israel.  
15–17 September: Sabra and Shatila massacre carried out by the Kata'ib led by Elias Hobeika and under Israeli army cover/support.
- 1983 Phalangist-controlled army in control of West Beirut.  
Syrian-supported dissidence breaks out in Fatah and PLO; fighting in Biqu'a Valley and Tripoli, North Lebanon results in expulsion of troops loyal to PLO Chairman Arafat.

- 1984 February: popular uprising in West Beirut ends Phalangist control.
- 1985 Armed popular resistance against Israeli troops obliges their withdrawal from most of South Lebanon, taken over by Amal, Hizbullah, and Communist Party; PLO enclave in Saida and Rashidiyya refugee camp near Tyre.  
May: Amal militia attacks Sabra, Shatila, Bourj al-Barajneh, beginning of War of the Camps.
- 1986 January: Four-Day Battle at Shatila;  
April: Twenty-Day Battle at Shatila;  
July: Thirty-five-Day Battle at Shatila;  
September: Six-Month Battle begins at Rashidiyya, then Bourj al-Barajneh in October, finally Shatila in November.
- 1987 February: lifting of food blockade at Bourj al-Barajneh and Shatila; but sniping continues.  
Reunification of PLO during Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers.  
December: outbreak of *Intifadah*, popular uprising in Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- 1988 January: Amal lifts siege of Shatila and Bourj al-Barajneh.  
May: Syrian-supported fighting in Beirut camps; Shatila and Bourj al-Barajneh fall; Arafat loyalists expelled.  
December: Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers declares constitution of a Palestinian state.

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Source: This Chronology through 1981 is an edited version of an outline given in Ingela Bendt & James Downing, *We Shall Return: Women of Palestine*, transl. by Ann Henning (London: Zed, 1982) 122–8. The continuation from 1982 is based on Dr. Chris Giannou's *Besieged: A Doctor's Story of Life and Death in Beirut*. Copyright © 1990. First American edition published 1992 by Olive Branch Press, an imprint of Interlink Publishing Group, Northampton, Massachusetts. Both adapted by permission.



## GLOSSARY OF POLITICAL GROUPS

**PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization, Arafat 'loyalists' during War of the Camps:**

*Fatah (Palestine National Liberation Movement):* largest and best financed; headed by Yassir Arafat; a broad coalition including all shades of opinion from Islamists to Marxists, with a common denominator of independent Palestinian nationalism.

*Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) — Abu Abbas faction:* minor group, purportedly Marxist in ideology.

*Arab Liberation Front:* pro-'Iraqi, minor group; led by Ahmed Abderrahim.

**The Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) (from 1984 to 1987):**

*Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP):* most important left-wing faction, two major currents: pan-'Arabist and Marxist; formerly led by Dr. George Habash; rejoined PLO ranks in April 1987.

*PFLP-General Command:* minor group; led by Ahmed Jibril; financed variously by Syria and Libya.

*Popular Struggle Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PSFLP):* minor Marxist-nationalist group; led by Dr. Samir Goshe.

*Palestine Liberation Front—Yacoub faction:* minor group, purportedly Marxist; rejoined PLO ranks in April 1987 and attempted to reunify PLF.

*Saiqa (Palestinian branch of the ruling Syrian Ba'ath Party):* minor group; little popular implantation.

*Fatah dissidents of Abu Musa:* scission from Arafat's Fatah, 1983; supported by Syria.

**Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP):**

major orthodox Marxist faction; left PLO at time of creation of PNSF but refused to join, instead allied with Communist Party in Democratic Alliance; led by Nayef Hawatmeh; rejoined PLO in April 1987. In 1991 split with Yasir Abed Rabbo forming the Palestine Democratic Union (Fida).

**Palestine Communist Party (PCP):**

formed in 1982; existence negligible in Palestinian diaspora, very important in occupied territories; joined PLO for the first time in April 1987; changed to Palestinian People's Party in 1991.

**Revolutionary Palestine Communist Party:**

scission of PCP; negligible existence anywhere; Syrian-supported.

**Fatah Revolutionary Council–Abu Nidal group:**

minor but extremist and violent faction; major perpetrator of attacks against Zionist and European targets as well as PLO moderates for more than fifteen years; underwent major scission and internal purges; originally financed by 'Iraq, then Syria, and Libya.

**Islamists in the occupied territories:**

in the first half of the 1950s, groups of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip organized military cells: *Shabab al-Tha'r* (Youth for Vengeance) and *Katibat al-Haq* (Battalion of Justice) of which Palestinian leaders Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) and Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad) were members; these organizations provided the inspiration for Fatah (Palestine National Liberation Movement).

*Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami* or Islamic Jihad was formed in the beginning of the 1980s in the Gaza Strip by Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) leaders who broke off from the organization in protest against its unwillingness to take on the Israeli occupation.

*Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Resistance Movement), acronym in 'Arabic, Hamas, emerged in late 1987, led by Muslim Brotherhood leaders, Shaykh Yassin and Shaykh Salah Shehadeh; the official date for its emergence is 8 December 1987, the date of the outbreak of the *intifadah* (uprising). Hamas has remained outside of PLO.

**Unified National Leadership of the Intifadah:** clandestine leadership of major PLO groups in occupied territories (Fatah, PFLP, DFLP, PCP) and nationalist Islamists.

**Lebanese National Movement (LNM):** broad coalition of largely secular Lebanese political parties, each with an armed militia, led originally by Kamal Jumblatt, assassinated in 1977; group included:

*Lebanese Communist Party* — traditional leadership was Christian, large number of Shi'a members.

*Progressive Socialist Party* — founded in 1949, mostly Druze members, led by Walid Jumblatt, son of Kamal.

*Nasserists* — collection of groups espousing pan-'Arabist ideology; secular; well-implanted in Sunni Muslim community.

*Syrian National Party* — (Parti Populaire Syrien) (PPS): formed in 1930s, believes in Greater Syria; particularly powerful in Greek Orthodox community.

**Amal Movement of the Dispossessed:** founded in early 1970s, originally supported by Fatah, became overtly sectarian Shi'a Muslim and pro-Iranian after the Islamic revolution in Iran, 1979; after 1982 Israeli invasion became pro-Syrian, and Syria's prime ally in Lebanon; led by Nabih Berri.

**Hizbullah — Party of God:** set up in 1982 in the Biqa'a, is a pro-Iranian Shi'a Islamist group; includes large number of disgruntled Amal militiamen and former Communists; core of diffuse groupings of radical factions; consistently sacrificed to effect the final withdrawal of Israeli forces and their nominee, the South Lebanon Army militia, from Lebanon, achieved in May 2000.

**Phalangists:** major right-wing Maronite Christian party; founded in 1936 and based on Franco's fascist Falangistas; Israel's Lebanese ally.

**Lebanese Forces:** amalgam of right-wing Christian militias unified through force of arms by Bashir Gemayel, assassinated Lebanese President-elect; Lebanese ally of Israel.

**Marada:** pro-Syrian right-wing Maronite militia, headed by son of former President Suleiman Franjeh, Tony Franjeh who was killed in 1978.







- WHERE IT ALL BEGAN
- TRUTH IS A WHOLE
- TESTIMONIES OF SURVIVORS
  - TAL AL-ZA'ATAR
  - ISRAELI INVASION
  - SABRA-SHATILA MASSACRE
  - WAR OF THE CAMPS
  - KHIAM PRISON
  - WRETCHED OF THE EARTH
- VIGNETTES OF THE CAMP

The title *I Painted the Snow Black ...* derives from a card Wissam Dawoud created for his Malaysian sponsor Animah Ferrar and her husband Syed Mohamed Syed Jaffar:

"I painted the snow black because we're afraid of the days."

Nahr al-Barid  
Palestinian Refugee Camp  
Lebanon



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