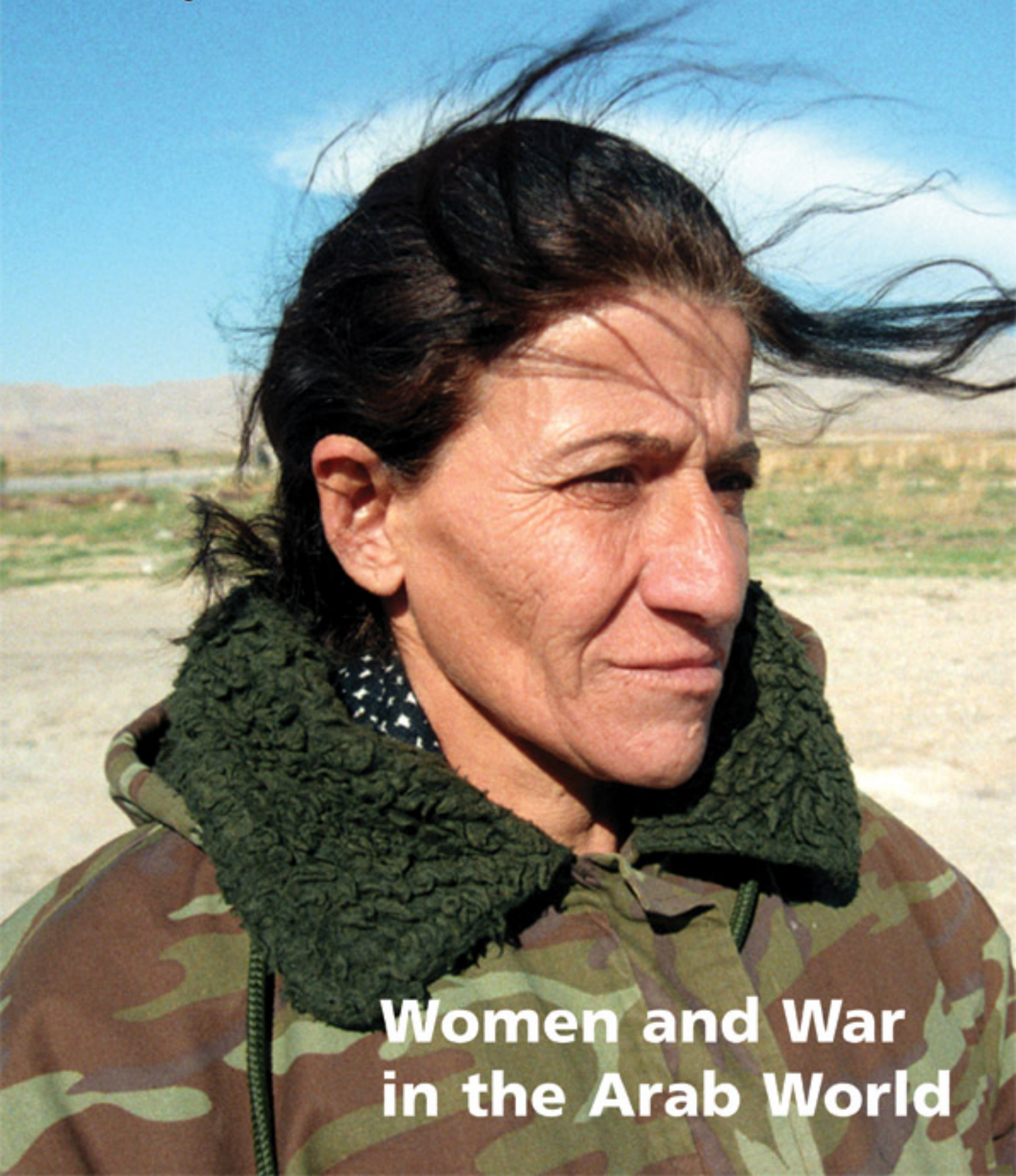




مجلة
الرائدة
AL-Raida
magazine

Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, LAU Volume XXI, No. 103, Fall 2003



**Women and War
in the Arab World**

ABOUT IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

OBJECTIVES: The Institute strives to serve as a data bank and resource center to advance a better understanding of issues pertaining to Arab women and children; to promote communication among individuals, groups and institutions throughout the world concerned with Arab women; to improve the quality of life of Arab women and children through educational and development projects; and to enhance the educational and outreach efforts of the Lebanese American University.

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include academic research on women, local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and films; and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the Women's

Documentation Center in the Stoltzfus Library at LAU. The Center holds books and periodicals. The Institute also publishes a variety of books and pamphlets on the status, development and conditions of Arab women, in addition to *Al-Raida*. Eight children's books with illustrations, and two guides, one of which specifies how to set up children's libraries, and the other which contains information about producing children's books, have also been published by IWSAW. In addition, the Institute has also created income generating projects which provide employment training and assistance to women from war-stricken families in Lebanon. The Institute has also devised a "Basic Living Skills Project" which provides a non-formal, integrated educational program for semi-literate women involved in development projects. Additional IWSAW projects include The Rehabilitation Program for Children's Mental Health; Teaching for Peace; and the Portable Library Project. The latter project was awarded the Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1994. For more information about these or any other projects, write to the Institute at the address provided.

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053, Chouran Beirut, 1102 2801 Lebanon; Telephone: 961 1 867618, ext. 1288; Fax: 961 1 791645. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT: *Al-Raida's* mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research of the conditions of women in the Arab world, especially conditions related to social change and development; and to report on the activities of the IWSAW and the Lebanese American University.

Each issue of *Al-Raida* features a File which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews and art news.

REPRINT RIGHTS: No unsigned articles may be reprinted without proper reference to *Al-Raida*. Permission to reprint signed articles must be obtained from the IWSAW.

SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES: We seek contributions from those engaged in research, analysis and study of women in the Arab world. Contributions should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages. Please send a hard copy and a diskette. We reserve the right to edit in accordance with our space limitations and editorial guidelines. Submissions will not be published if they have been previously published elsewhere.

Women and War in the Arab World

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial	2	Four Women Relate their Experience in Combat During the War	42
Opinion	4		
Research News	6	Iraqi Women After the War	48
Quote / Unquote	7	The Case of Samar Alami	51
NewsBriefs	8	A Journalist Diary: On the Horrors of War	56
IWSAW News	9	Vermeer in Baghdad	67
		Losing Sense	68
File			
File Intro	10		
Women and War - An Overview	11		
Kurdish Women in the Zone of Genocide and Gendercide	20		
Palestinian Women Negotiate Violent Conflict	26		
Addressing Women's Human Rights -Sudan	31		
Women Fighting Against War Amnesia	39		
		Special Features	
		On Women and War	70
		Report: The Sudanese Women's Advocacy Mission to New York and Washington DC	72
		Report: International Leaders Prioritize Human Security at WLP Conference	76
		Book Review: Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation	79

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Al-Raida

The quarterly journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World
Lebanese American University
P.O. Box 13-5053
Chouran, Beirut,
1102 2801 Lebanon
Telephone: 961 1 867618, ext. 1288
Fax: 961 1 791645
e-mail: al-raida@lau.edu.lb

Editor: Ann Lesch
Contributing Editor: Diana Mukalled
Assistant Editor: Myriam Sfeir
Designer: Zouheir Debs

Advisory Board Members:

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THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR AL-RAIDA IS US \$ 30. SUBSCRIPTIONS BEGIN IN JANUARY AND END IN DECEMBER.

Women and War

■ Diana Moukalled

Television producer and presenter, Future TV

" Fearful for their safety and unnerved by last weekend's attack on a high-ranking female official, Iraqi women activists are retreating from the public sphere and choosing to keep their work low-profile ... They do not want to be featured because they have seen what has happened to Aqila Hashimi." This was how Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of the UN Development Fund for Women, described how Iraqi women felt after the murder of Aqila Hashemi, a member of the interim governing council. Unidentified armed men had shot at Hashemi in September, while she was standing in front of her house in Baghdad, and she had died a few days later from her wounds. Hashemi's murder came as a shock to Iraqi women, and heightened their feeling that they were direct targets in this war.

This murder sent a twofold message, warning Iraqi women against seeking to assume a role in Iraq. There have been a succession of messages directed at Iraqi women, even before the demise of Saddam Hussein; but today, their situation is far more complicated and difficult, considering the lack of security and chaos nurtured by the extremists' calls for banning women from going out or working, and their discrimination against women who are not veiled.

Aqila Hashemi's murder was no coincidence. She was an educated and successful woman, and one of three female members of Iraq's interim governing council. There is no doubt that whoever planned the murder of this active woman meant to target primarily women as a group, over and above targeting a member of the governing council. Hashemi appeared as the weak loser, or at least this is what lingered in the minds of people, who were made to believe that through this woman, not only the governing council was being targeted but also an entire spectrum of women who had ambitions to play a role in Iraq's public life. The culture of fear made a powerful comeback. Indeed, it is a part of the lives of many women in our region, and especially those living in a state of insecurity.

Women have always been targeted in times of war or cri-

sis. They represent society's core honor and shame and when they are targeted, the entire society is targeted through them. This is merely the continuation of an old culture that has existed in many regions and many political and social contexts, which have contributed to putting women in two contradictory situations - either one of total protection to the point of suffocation or one of full targeting to the point of killing.

During the course of my visits to several countries that experienced wars and conflicts, women were represented as the traditional victims. In Algeria, the women were the first group targeted by the fighters in the early 1990s, as they were either Taghout (security force members) or their daughters or sisters. They were taken by fighters to the mountains as prisoners of war to serve for their pleasure and service. They are the reporters who had to be killed so that they wouldn't write about these "guardians of morality" who impose chains around their homes.

In Sudan, the matter is no less one of suffering and gloom. Kidnappings and rapes of women during the armed conflict that pitted the north against the south in the 1980s and 1990s were widespread, yet hardly covered by the media. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Iraqi army committed systematic rape against dozens of Kuwaiti women. This shook the Kuwaitis even more than the invasion itself, and their confusion manifested itself in the way the Kuwaiti society dealt with it, namely in a secretive manner, fearful of admitting it officially. As a result, there was no effective treatment to this problem, to the extent that there was fear of admitting it officially.

This phenomenon is not limited to Arab societies, as numerous similar cases have been reported in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Chechnya and many other regions that experienced armed conflicts. In Afghanistan, when the Taliban regime fell and was being replaced by the North Alliance factions, the Afghani tribes rushed to contact the Americans and ask them that the new authority respect the Afghani traditions related to women. This was

the first issue raised by the heads of tribes to the Americans. Societies fear for their women in the first place, as they represent their Achilles heel.

Addressing the subject of Arab women in times of war carries the risk of falling into a feminist discourse that could lead to extreme bias, which would represent an obstacle to offering an accurate assessment of women's share of responsibility. In the end, women represent half the society and, in that sense, they are part of the situation that produced their suffering. In Iraq, we saw women who were part of the Baathist regime, such as the biological weapons expert dubbed 'Dr. Germ' by the Western press and the women of the ruling Iraqi family who were simultaneously executioners and victims. There are also women fighters with the Iranian Mujahideen Khalq group, who leave observers at a loss as to whether they are victims or executioners.

So women resemble us, we children of this sad East. In Palestine, the phenomenon of suicide bombers turned young Palestinian women into human bombs that exploded in the face of our degraded situation. Even if women are more exposed to certain dangers than men, this does not mean that we have to always portray them as victims. The truth is that wars sometimes offer women an opportunity to display their strength.

Traditionally, women at war are depicted as victims or silent defenders of their homes. But during the American military operations in Iraq, women turned out to be fighters as well as victims, politicians, and protestors against the war or in support of it. And yet, the strongest image of women that lingered in viewers' minds was that of women mourning their sons or husbands. One of the images that moved me most was that of the Iraqi woman rocking the bed of her wounded son in one of Baghdad's hospitals. This image embodied the everlasting situation of the grieving mother. But we probably have to rethink the issue and resist the beauty and force of this image because, in the end, this image represents one woman in a poignant situation. When I read the caption accompanying the image, it appeared that this woman was the aunt of the child, and it wasn't clear from the text what had happened to the child's mother and if she had been injured by the war or not.

Despite the fact that this war was covered directly by reporters and photographers stationed at the fronts, the real war took place far from our eyes and we can add that we seldom saw the female victims.

There were news reports about seven women and children killed at an American checkpoint, because a soldier had not fired a warning shot. There was the story of the Iraqi

boy, Ali Ismail Abbas, who lost his family and had his arms amputated. Ali's mother was killed in the shelling. In such cases, we never saw the images; maybe they would have been too harsh. But in the end, for every image of a woman, there were always many other images that were even harsher and could not be published.

The role of women in war varies significantly. In a war, women can find themselves suddenly alone and for the first time in their lives responsible for their families, especially in our region, where men still enjoy authority as heads of their families. Many women in Iraq, Algeria or Sudan had to leave their houses to earn money for the first time in their lives. And despite the harsh conditions, such experiences proved to be an added source of strength and determination among certain women.

Al-Raida has decided to dedicate this issue to Arab women and war in an attempt to reflect the various dimensions of women's roles in wars and conflicts that have raged and still rage in the region. Women actively participate in many armed conflicts all around the world and have played a role in wars throughout history. World War II was the turning point that shed light on the role of women, whether in the reserve units or in supporting German and British forces, not to mention their direct participation in the fighting, as in the case of the Soviet Union, as members of all services and units, representing eight per cent of the total armed forces. Since that time, women have assumed a greater role. Despite women's participation, willingly or not, in armed conflicts as fighters or in supportive roles, certain countries and societies, including Arab ones, refuse to allow women to assume fighting roles in wars. It is possible to argue that women endure the experience of war mainly as individuals who are party of the civilian populations.

Are women more prone than men to being exposed in armed conflicts? There is no clear-cut answer to this. Women are not necessarily more exposed, but one has to admit that they are more exposed to marginalization, poverty and suffering resulting from armed conflicts, especially since they are undoubtedly victims of discrimination in times of peace. Women are particularly exposed considering the campaigns depicting them as symbols of cultural and ethnic identities, as bearers of future generations.

The century's conflicts make it clear that women have become more and more a target in fighting. And yet, men are no doubt also clearly exposed; indeed, there are certain conflicts in which the average of men detained reaches 96 per cent and that of disappeared men stands at 90 per cent. Armed conflict affects the lives of all civilians especially women; and its ill-effects have a bearing on society as a whole and frequently last long after the use of arms subsides.

Ramallah letter:

I.T.'s tragedy*

■ Islah Jad

Ph.D researcher at the School of African and Asian Studies (SOAS), University of London

It took me some time to collect the bits and pieces of this story. My sources are I.T.'s husband, a doctor, and three of her neighbors and friends. I.T.'s story shows how a human being can be killed twice, once psychologically and once physically. The tragedy developed like this:

I.T. is a married woman with three young daughters: One is five and a half years old, the second is three and a half, and the baby is six months old. I.T. and her husband originally came from Nablus. After they married eight years ago, they moved to Ramallah, where they have no family except a married sister-in-law with no children, who lives in downtown Ramallah. I.T. received a degree in pharmacology and is known as a quiet and intelligent woman. She took many courses in French and Hebrew and she speaks very good English. Her husband studied in England for thirteen years to become an optician and lens expert. He operates a very successful business. I.T. owns her own pharmacy, which she runs with two assistants who come from nearby villages.

A few weeks before the Israeli army reoccupied Ramallah on March 29, 2002, I.T. was obliged to liquidate her pharmacy. Her assistants were besieged in their villages by the Israeli army and could not come to work. In addition, the pharmacy was continually hit by Israeli fire from the near-

by Psagot settlement, because it was located near a post for the Palestinian national guard. Its window glass was shattered and it became dangerous to stay in it. I.T. could not run the pharmacy by herself, as she had three little girls who needed her attention. Therefore, she shut it down.

Two days after the Israeli army reoccupied Ramallah, loud speakers ordered all men from age fifteen to 55 to turn themselves in to the Israeli army. After the third announcement, I.T.'s husband gave himself up, fearing that the soldiers would come to his house and destroy it, as they had done to other houses. Around a thousand men gathered in Moughtaribiin school. After staying two days in the cold rain, they were taken to Ofra settlement, just north east of Ramallah. Once there, no one knew where they were and how they could be contacted. I.T. was left alone with her three children. She received phone calls from friends and relatives. When the next door neighbor asked if she needed anything, she always said no. I.T.'s closest neighbor couldn't visit her, because snipers were on top of the buildings that surrounded them.

After four days, the curfew was lifted for the first time. O.M., I.T.'s closest neighbor, visited her and asked her daugh-

ter to stay with I.T.'s children to enable I.T. to go out and shop for her family. O.M. noticed that the girls were neglected and hungry. I.T. complained that they took her husband because they wanted to separate them. In an attempt to comfort her, O.M. told her that the men would be released soon. She asked when, so O.M. said: "Maybe after an hour or so." I.T. dashed to change her clothes and prepare her children to meet their father. After some time, she became nervous and blamed O.M. for lying to her. O.M. was surprised, but realized that I.T. was not OK.

O.M. left I.T.'s house because she had to get home before the curfew was reimposed, but asked the downstairs neighbor to host I.T. in her apartment. She did, but no one could sleep that night as I.T. kept closing all the windows, fearing that 'snipers' would shoot her. She accused her neighbor of collaborating with the Israeli army to assassinate her and her family. It seems that I.T. had had a nervous breakdown.

The next morning O.M. risked her life and ran quickly to see I.T. and comfort her. She left when I.T. seemed calm. That night, I.T. started to throw things out the window and ran away from her house with her three children barefoot, claiming that the Israelis wanted to blow up the building.

O.M. took her to her house and, after some time, went to sleep, as it was already 2 a.m. After half an hour, her husband shouted: "She's burning down the house!" I.T. was spilling kerosene on the beds and covers, saying: "I will demolish the temple over my head and over theirs, too." She threw herself on top of her baby; it took O.M. and her husband awhile to rescue the baby. They tried to calm her down until 7 a.m., when she opened the door and ran out holding her baby, with the two others clinging to her dress.

She dashed into the street, cursing Jews and Arabs. She reached a military checkpoint where some people said she threw stones at the soldiers. She entered the Red Crescent hospital, located nearby, followed by soldiers. A doctor checked her and realized that she was hysterical, suffering from a nervous breakdown. He explained her situation to the soldiers and asked them to inform their colleagues so that they would not shoot at her. The doctor called her relatives in Nablus and her sister-in-law in Ramallah, but no one could come to her aid as they were all under curfew.

I.T. then left her children at that hospital and ran to Ramallah hospital, where she was kept for a while and given a shot to calm her down. But she ran back to the Red Crescent hospital to find her children. An ambulance took them all back to their house, where she became very violent. O.M. asked the next door neighbor to stay with her that night, but it was impossible for anyone to get even a minute of sleep. She was sensitive to the colors blue, red, and black, imagining that electronic rays were going to blow up the house. O.M. asked the Red Cross

and Red Crescent to bring her sister-in-law to stay with her, but they refused, saying that the curfew was too tight and they were not allowed to move in the streets.

The following day, I.T. screamed for her husband and then took her eldest daughter and ran away again. This time she went to President Arafat's compound to ask him to help her get her husband out of detention. The compound was besieged by Israeli tanks and soldiers. They stopped her, beat her severely, and broke her hand. The soldiers called an ambulance from the Ramallah hospital to take her away. In the hospital I.T. called O.M., telling her that she had woken up feeling pain everywhere, with a broken hand and red marks all over her body, but she didn't know why or how she had been injured. O.M. talked to I.T.'s oldest daughter, who told her: "The army beat my mom and I was screaming." The hospital managed to send an ambulance to get her sister-in-law and drove them all to I.T.'s house at 7 p.m. I.T. became worse and her sister-in-law was afraid. At 6 a.m. she called O.M., complaining that I.T. was violent and the girls were screaming.

I.T. ran away again, holding a big stone in her hand, with which she smashed her car, saying: "They put cameras inside it to blow up." Her neighbors took the stone from her hand, but she ran away again to the president's compound to get help finding her husband. When I.T. arrived at the compound, she was 'received' by six bullets that hit both her legs. Later, a female Israeli doctor phoned O.M., telling her that I.T. was in Hadassah hospital in Ein Karem (West Jerusalem). The doctor wanted some background information about her. As O.M. did not understand English, she asked the doctor to find someone who could speak to her in Arabic. The doctor did not call again, as she apparently did not find anyone who could talk to O.M. I.T. later called O.M., telling her that her two legs were in casts and she did not know how she reached the hospital. The girls were left with their aunt. O.M. and the aunt decided to put the baby on powdered milk, since I.T. was not there to breastfeed her.

I.T.'s husband was released after ten days, without any charges filed against him. But he found his family at risk. He said that I.T. had suffered from a slight depression and had been treated once by a specialist. But she had never been in such a desperate condition. "Did you visit her" at Hadassah, O.M. asked him. "Are you joking? First, we are under curfew. Second, how can we reach West Jerusalem, where the hospital is located? I need permission to go there and who will give that to me now," he responded. He contacted Physicians Without Borders and other humanitarian organizations to enable him to visit his wife. "I just need to show her that I am fine in order to comfort her; she must be now in need of my presence beside her."

* Names have been changed to insure privacy.

Recent Publications

Carpenter, R.C. "Surfacing Children: Limitations of Genocidal Rape Discourse" *Human Rights Quarterly*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, vol.22, No. 2.

Cockburn, C. *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identity in Conflict*, Zed Books, London and New York, 1998.

Lindsey, C. The Detention of Women in Wartime, *International Review of Red Cross*, No. 842, June 2001.

Announcement

NEH Summer Institute on Contemporary Islam

We invite all interested college and university teachers, from all disciplines, to apply for the NEH Summer Institute on Diversity and Debates in Contemporary Islam, to be held at Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO, June 21 to July 30, 2004. Through discussions, readings, lectures, and film, we will explore the diversity of Muslims social, religious, and intellectual lives around the world. We will bring to Colorado Springs leading scholars of Islam in the Middle East, Asia, Europe and North America, from history, anthropology, and religious studies. No specific prior knowledge or expertise is required. Contact John R. Bowen via email.

John R. Bowen
Box 1112, Washington University
1 Brookings Drive
St. Louis MO 63130
Phone: 314/935-5680
Email: jbowen@wustl.edu

Films

Jenin Jenin

Directed by Mohamed Bakri

'Where is God,' an elderly man desperately wonders when surveying the debris in the Palestinian refugee camp Jenin.

The film, directed and co-produced by Palestinian actor and director Mohammed Bakri, includes testimony from Jenin residents after the Israeli army's Defensive Wall operation, during which the city and camp were the scenes of fierce fighting. The operation ended with Jenin flattened and scores of Palestinians dead. Palestinians as well as numerous human rights groups accused Israel of committing war crimes in the April 2002 attack on the refugee camp. "Jenin Jenin" shows the extent to which

the prolonged oppression and terror has affected the state of mind of the Palestinian inhabitants of Jenin.

Bitterness and grief are the prevailing feelings among the majority of the population. Many have lost loved ones or are still searching for victims and furniture among the debris. A little girl, who does not seem to be much older than twelve, tells her story but knows no fear. The ongoing violence in her day-to-day life only nourishes her feelings of hatred and the urge to take revenge. She tells what she would do to Prime Minister Sharon if he visited the camp and she shouts that the Palestinians will never give up the struggle. They will keep on producing children, who can continue the fight against injustice.

The sad question forces itself on the spectator. What will become of a country, a people when its children are confronted with war and violence from a very early age?

Banned in Israel, "Jenin Jenin" is dedicated to Iyad Samudi, the producer of the film, who returned home to Yamun after the shooting of the film was completed. On June 23, as Israeli forces besieged Yamun, Samudi was shot and killed as he was leaving a military-closed area with three friends.

<http://www.arabfilm.com/item/242/>

Generation X-Saddam

Directed by Shelley Saywell

On the eve of the 2003 U.S. invasion, filmmaker Shelley Saywell traveled to Iraq to film the lives of ordinary people - especially young Iraqis - who were caught between Saddam's tyranny and a devastated economy (for which they blamed the West).

Now, Saywell returns to find the people she met and interviewed before the war. What happened to them? Have they survived? Have their feelings about Saddam and the U.S. changed, or remained the same?

Traveling from Baghdad to Basra, across the severely damaged country, Saywell visits the ruined university campus, the back streets of Baghdad on night patrol, the blood soaked cells of Abu Graib prison, and the mass graves where mothers search for a scrap of familiar clothing.

Surprisingly, Saywell finds all her protagonists. There are surprises, some ironies, and we hear some things that could not be told while Saddam was in power.

But many anti-American feelings remain. Most pervasive is the sense of desperate confusion, the constant worry about what lies ahead in the dangerous, chaotic life under occupation.

<http://www.frif.com/new2003/genx.html>

"No woman is exempt from violence and exploitation. During conflict women and girls are attacked because they are related to political adversaries, because they are political leaders themselves, or simply because they were at home when the soldiers arrived. ... During conflict, women and girls experience violence at the hands of many others besides armed group. Women are physically and economically forced or left with little choice but to become sex workers or to exchange sex for food, shelter, safe passage or other needs; their bodies become part of a barter system, a form of exchange that buys the necessities of life ... Police and other civilian officials often take advantage of women's powerlessness even when they are in custody. Women have been raped and tortured as a form of interrogation." (Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peacebuilding*, p.11).

"On our way back, my friend was telling me how our shared friend Salwa, who is also a gynecologist, helped women to give birth on the phones, the women were in labor while she was giving them directions over the phones on what to do. One of the women was screaming in a hysterical way when she asked her to cut her baby's cord, she was afraid to hurt him, but she calmed her down." (Testimony, Islah Jad, Palestine).

"And yet Palestinian women continue to have babies. Is that a political choice? At the centre of most women's lives are the children. Soha, a nursing student, breaks down and cries in her home in Aida Camp when a rocket whizzes through her kitchen window at supper-time and out through the facing wall into the mercifully empty bedroom. Her mother tells her to buck up and not scare the children. It is sobering to note that the first Palestinian woman to make the political decision to become a human bomb was a nurse, caring daily for children injured or maimed by Israeli bullets. In between these two extremes - the giving and the giving up of life, hundreds of thousands of women go about their business as best they can." (Ahdaf Soueif, *The Guardian*, March 13, 2003).

"Gendercide ... the deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender). Gendercide is a sex-neutral term, in that the victims may be either male or female. There is a need for such a sex-neutral term, since sexually discriminatory killing is just as wrong when the victims happen to be male. The term also calls attention to the fact that gender roles have often had lethal consequences, and that these are in important respects anal-

ogous to the lethal consequences of racial, religious, and class prejudice." (http://gendercide.org/what_is_gendercide.html).

"The main regret I have about how I dealt with the war was about my children. I seemed to have put upon them my own feelings of being challenged by this war, or even perhaps excited by it, and did not fully consider whether they felt this way. I didn't consider if I were coping with some things as an adult that they did not have the ability to cope with them as children. I think we did not give them the opportunity to express fully, openly and honestly, what they felt. We just assumed they were doing all right. If someone asked me again would I knowingly put my children through this again, I would say resoundingly 'No.' This is one of the big scars of the war" (Lamia Rustum Shehadeh (ed.), *Women and War in Lebanon*, p. 239).

"Salma M. [forty-nine-year-old] described what happened after the men forced her into the car: "They made me put my head down between my legs ... [Then they took me into a building where] they were hitting me on the head and arms ... They raped me, in many, many ways ... When I came home my appearance was so bad ... They burned my legs with cigarettes. They bit me, on my shoulders and arms. All of them raped me, there were five or six more than the four who kidnapped me, there were ten of them total and I was raped by all of ten of them." ... Salma M. told Human Rights Watch that she fears the perpetrators will return ..." (*Human Rights Watch Report*, July 2003, retrieved from: [<http://hrw.org/reports/2003/iraq0703/1.htm>]).

"Women from all areas rushed out to take on a public political function, throwing themselves between soldiers and the young men they were trying to seize. One day in ... a poor village within a small city, women wielding pots and pans attacked a patrol of soldiers in order to release a youth being arrested. On another occasion a man in his early twenties was being beaten by soldiers ... A woman rushed up with her baby in her arms and began shouting at the man, "I told you not to leave the house today, that the situation is too dangerous. But you didn't listen; you never listen to me!" She turned in disgust to the soldiers and, telling them to beat him, cried, "I am sick of you and your baby; take him and leave me alone," pushed the baby into the young man's arms, and ran away. The confused soldiers soon left the scene. In a few minutes the woman reappeared, retrieved her child, and wished the young man safety and a quick recovery. They were total strangers. ..." (Suha Sabbagh, *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*, 1998, p.65-66).

From Iraq

Join the International Campaign to repeal the Governing Council's Resolution 137, which cancels the current Iraqi Family Law and introduces the Islamic Law (Shari'a) in Iraq.

On 29 December 2003, the Governing Council passed a resolution No. 137 to cancel the current Iraqi family law in practice since 1959 and introduce the Islamic law (Shari'a) instead.

We believe that this anti-freedom, misogynist and anti-modernist resolution will push back the Iraqi society to the Stone Age. It will deny the most basic women's rights gained during decades of relentless struggle and set back their legal status by centuries. If the resolution is to become a law, women in Iraq will become subjects of daily abuses and exploitation for not observing the strict Islamic law and traditions. Polygamy, minor marriage, pleasure marriage (mut'ah), compulsory hijab, stoning women to death on adultery, acid-throwing on them, flogging for disobeying Islamic laws, beating women by their husbands, sexual segregation in public places will all be lawful. Women will be denied the right to leave the house without the permission of the husband, to travel without a chaperone, continue education after marriage, seek divorce, choose a partner without family's consent, and custody of children. They will be prohibited from working in many fields and participation in sport, dance, singing or even listening to music.

The current Iraqi family law, which was amended by the Ba'ath regime, is itself a reactionary and anti-women law based on Shari'a. It should be replaced by a progressive law that ensure protection of rights of women rather than a reactionary and misogynist law to deny those rights. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq is running an International Campaign to repeal the Governing Council's resolution 137. We call on all individuals and progressive organizations to support our campaign. We request you to sign this petition and defend the rights of women in Iraq.

Source: <http://www.petitiononline.com/OWFI/petition.html>

From Morocco

Morocco Adopts Landmark Family Law Supporting Women's Equality

Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) and our partner organization l'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) are pleased to report that on January 25, 2004, the government of Morocco adopted a new landmark Family Law supporting women's equality and granting them new rights in marriage and divorce, among others.

In April 2001, efforts to pass similar family law reforms were suspended while a Consultative Commission established by His Majesty King Mohammed VI studied the possibility of revising the Moudawana, Morocco's Civil Status Code that encompassed family law governing women's status. The continued

advocacy and awareness-raising efforts of women's rights activists, strong backing by government leaders such as Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi, and the personal public support of HM King Mohammed VI contributed to the Commission's decision in favor of a reformed Moroccan Family Law. In October 2003, almost two and a half years after the establishment of the Commission, HM King Mohammed VI publicly announced new reforms creating a modern Family Law consistent with the tolerant spirit of Islam and "lifting the iniquity imposed on women, protecting children's rights, and safeguarding men's dignity." During the fall and winter of 2003, women's rights organizations, organized within the "Printemps de l'Egalité" network, analyzed the details of the draft legislation's text and organized workshops, round tables, and discussion groups to prepare for renewed lobbying efforts in Parliament and to educate the public about the reforms.

On February 3, 2004, the Presidents of both houses of Parliament presented the unanimously approved new family law to HM King Mohammed VI. The new legislation replaces the family law included in the Moudawana and includes the following reforms:

Equality:

- Husband and wife share joint responsibility for the family;
- The wife is no longer legally obliged to obey her husband;
- The adult woman is entitled to self-guardianship, rather than that of a male family member, and may exercise it freely and independently;
- The minimum age of marriage is 18 for both men and women.

Divorce:

- The right to divorce is a prerogative of both men and women, exercised under judicial supervision;
- The principle of divorce by mutual consent is established.

Polygamy:

- Polygamy is subject to the judge's authorization and to stringent legal conditions, making the practice nearly impossible;
- The woman has the right to impose a condition in the marriage contract requiring that her husband refrain from taking other wives;
- If there is no pre-established condition, the first wife must be informed of her husband's intent to remarry, the second wife must be informed that her husband-to-be is already married, and moreover, the first wife may ask for a divorce due to harm suffered.

Enforcement of Law:

- The family law assigns a key role to the judiciary in upholding the rule of law and provides for the public prosecutor to be a party to every legal action involving the enforcement of family law stipulations.

Children's Rights:

- The woman is given the possibility of retaining custody of her child even upon remarrying or moving out of the area where her husband lives;
- The child's right to acknowledgment of paternity is protected in that case that the marriage has not been officially registered.

Source: <http://www.learningpartnership.org/events/newsalerts/morocco0204.phtml#adfmoc>

Launching of the Basic Living Skills Program



IWSAW director Mona Khalaf, IWSAW program officer Anita Nassar with participants in the BLSP workshop

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University launched on October 21, 2003 its Basic Living Skills Program (BLSP). The BLSP is a non-formal integrated educational kit in Arabic, geared towards illiterate and semi-literate women in the Arab World. The Program consists of 11 units that tackle the issues of health, environment, nutrition, reproductive health, childhood to adolescence, civic education, legal rights, women empowerment, women empowerment through work, chronic diseases, and special needs. The BLSP was funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and facilitated by Mercy Corps-Lebanon.

Professor Dr. Rita Süßmuth Visits IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) and Goethe-Institut hosted on November 5, 2003 Professor Dr. Rita Süßmuth, former President of the German Bundestag. Professor Dr. Süßmuth held a press conference in the presence of MPs Bahia Hariri, Nayla Mouawad and Ghinwa Jalloul on "How Can Women Reach Top Political Positions?" After the press conference, Professor Dr. Süßmuth gave a lecture on the status of women in Germany.

Left to right: IWSAW director Mona Khalaf, MP Ghinwa Jalloul, Mr. Rolf Stehle, director of Goethe Institut, MP Bahia Hariri, Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth, former President of the German Bundestag, MP Nayla Mouawad.



Women and War in the Arab World

In wars, some women choose to take up arms but, for most, war is about coping with the disruption of normal life. Women are the carers, the sustainers, the mediators. Throughout history, women and children constitute 75 percent of war refugees. Unfortunately, even after fighting ceases, the issues driving the conflict are often disregarded or swept under the rug once the ink has dried on a peace accord, prolonging instability and misery for millions.

In Arab countries, many people have suffered from war. This issue of *Al-Raida* highlights the situation of women in the Arab world in conflict areas. It begins with an overview of the situation of women during war. The article prepared by Charlotte Lindsey of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) sheds light on the multifaceted ways in which women experience armed conflicts. Shahrazad Mojab takes on the plight of Kurdish women by addressing the issue of genocide and gendercide. Maria Holt attempts to shed light on the past and future struggles faced by Palestinian Women under occupation. Nada Mustafa Ali discusses women's human rights in war torn Sudan and the struggle to restore democracy. Darine Al-Omari and Lynn Maalouf concentrate on Lebanon. Al-Omari interviews four women fighters from different political backgrounds, who relate their experiences in combat

during the Lebanese war. Maalouf addresses the 'case of the disappeared' and highlights the active role women played through the Committee of Families of Kidnapped or Disappeared in Lebanon.

Hazem Al-Amin writes about the current state of affairs of Iraqi women and Diana Mukalled exposes the unfairness surrounding the trial of Samar Alami and Jawwad Botmeh. Mukalled also uncovers the past and future conditions of women in Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait and Western Sahara based on her many journalistic missions to various conflict areas. Fawwaz Trabulsi in his piece "Losing Sense" analyzes the award winning photo 'The Madonna' of a woman grieving the loss of her loved ones after a massacre in Algeria.

This issue of *Al-Raida* also contains two conference reports and a book review. Marie-Christine Aquarone reports on a Sudanese women's advocacy mission to New York and Washington and Abby Jenkins, Megan Brown, and Sian MacAdam discuss the Women's Learning Partnership Conference on human security. Last but not least, Valerie Morgan reviews the book *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation* edited by Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin.

Diana Mukalled

Women and War An overview*

■ Charlotte Lindsey

Responsible for the ICRC's Project on Women and War. As a delegate she carried out missions in many parts of the world.

Frequently today's conflicts are internal - fought within a country between different ethnic or political groups of the same "nationality" - rather than international, fought between countries and across borders. This has led to the civilian population becoming increasingly "caught up" in the conflict and/or targeted by the parties to the armed conflict as part of a deliberate strategy. War at home rather than abroad has had a major impact on women as members of the civilian population. Furthermore, women are increasingly taking up arms as members of the armed forces.

Much attention has been given in the past few years in academic debate and the media to sexual violence, particularly rape, inflicted upon women and girls during war, as well as the protection afforded to women under international humanitarian law. As conflicts have illustrated - and the media have reported - this attention is fully justified. However, it has tended to be confined to sexual violence and less attention focused on the other issues of the impact of armed conflict on women. This article aims to draw attention to the multifaceted ways in which women experience armed conflict and, to a limited extent, to some of the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist and protect women.

■ Women Taking Part in Hostilities

Women have tended to be classified within a single category "women and children", and as "vulnerable". Yet women are not necessarily vulnerable and certainly have needs, experiences and roles in war that differ from those of children (although it must be stated that in many conflicts children are coerced into taking on adult roles). Women are actively engaging in many armed conflicts around the world and have played a part in wars throughout history.

It was the Second World War that highlighted their role primarily in reservist or support units (including work in munitions factories) in the German and British forces and, in the case of the Soviet Union, their direct participation in the fighting as members of all services and units "constituting 8% of the total armed forces".¹

Since then, women have assumed a much greater role and are more frequently joining the armed forces, voluntarily and involuntarily, performing both support and combatant roles. To give a few examples, in the United States military, "overall, 14% of active duty personnel are women", and of the US forces who served in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, 40,000 were women.² It is estimated that

a fifth of the Eritrean armed forces are female³ and up to a third of the fighting forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) involved in the civil war in Sri Lanka are women.⁴ The role of the female "suicide bombers" of the LTTE has also underscored the horrifying extent to which women are prepared to take action in that ongoing conflict. Ironically, much of their "success" in hitting targets can be attributed to the fact that as women they can often get closer to their objective - possibly due to a perception that they are more vulnerable and therefore less likely to carry out such attacks. "For many reasons, women are the preferred choice of secular groups when it comes to infiltration and strike missions. First, women are less suspicious. Second, in the conservative societies of the Middle East and South Asia, there is a hesitation to body search a woman. Third, women can wear a suicide device beneath her clothes and appear pregnant."⁵ Women are as capable as men of perpetrating extreme violence.

Women are also "actively" supporting their menfolk in military operations - not by taking up arms but by providing them with the moral support needed to wage war. Data collected in the course of the ICRC's "People on War" survey⁶ exemplify this, as for example an elder and religious leader in Somalia said: "I believe that those civilians and fighters belong to one family group, once the civilians are going with the fighters - doing things like cooking, treating them, and any other necessary thing... Whatever happens to the civilians is up to them. If they collaborate with the fighters, then what happens is up to them." And it is not just Somalis that responded in this way, as one young man in Abkhazia stated: "Somebody can hold a submachine gun and somebody only a ladle. But it doesn't mean a cook is less responsible than a soldier."

Furthermore, there are women endangered because of their presence amongst the armed forces but who are there completely against their will - abducted for sex or to cook and clean in the camp. During the period of their abduction - and often after - these women and girls can be in considerable danger from attack by the opposing forces as well as their abductors. The best known and wide-scale example of such abductions was that of the so-called "comfort women" in the Far East during the Second World War - a term which in no way encompasses the horrific nature of the ordeal to which these women were subjected during their detention by the Japanese military. In recent years, women and girls have also reportedly been abducted by the armed groups in other countries, such as Uganda.

Women have furthermore been under suspicion and targeted for the suspected or actual role of their menfolk, in

order to get to the absent man by intimidating and attacking the woman.

Despite these examples of voluntary and involuntary participation of women in armed conflict as combatants and in support roles, some countries and cultures refuse the participation of women in combat roles in the armed forces. The majority of women experience the effects of armed conflict as part of the civilian population.

Women as Members of the Civilian Population

As members of the civilian population, women and girls - like men and boys - are subjected to innumerable acts of violence during situations of armed conflict. They often suffer the direct or indirect effects of the fighting, enduring indiscriminate bombing and attacks as well as a lack of food and other essentials needed for a healthy survival. Women invariably have to bear greater responsibility for their children and their elderly relatives - and often the wider community - when the men in the family have left to fight, are interned or detained, missing or dead, internally displaced or in exile. The very fact that many of the menfolk are absent often heightens the insecurity and danger for the women and children left behind, and exacerbates the breakdown of the traditional support mechanisms upon which the community - especially women - have previously relied. Increased insecurity and fear of attack often cause women and children to flee, and it is common knowledge that women and children constitute the majority of the world's refugees. But what of the women who do not flee?

Ironically, many women often do not flee the fighting - or the threat of hostilities - because they and their families believe that the very fact that they are women (often with children) will afford them a greater measure of protection from the warring parties. They believe their gender - their socially constructed role - will protect them. Therefore, women often stay to protect the family's property and livelihood; to care for the elderly, young and sick family members who cannot flee as they are less mobile; to keep their children in school (as education is such an important factor for many families and their future); to visit and support family members in detention; to search for their missing family members; and even to assess the level of insecurity and danger in order to decide whether it is safe for the displaced family members to return. In fact, this perceived protection - that as a woman you will be safe - is often not the reality. On the contrary, women have been targeted precisely because they are women. The ICRC assisted, for example, large numbers of mostly elderly and frail women left behind in the former United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia (UNPAs, frequently referred to as the "Krajinas"). They had been left by their fleeing family members to protect the property and/or

could not or would not leave their homes. Even these elderly - and often bedridden - women were not free from harassment and attack.

Women are often under direct threat from indiscriminate attack due to the proximity of the fighting. They have also been forced to harbour and feed soldiers, thus being exposed to the risk of reprisals by the opposing forces and placed in difficult and inappropriate situations: another mouth to feed on scant resources, and the personal safety of the woman and her children threatened. As one peasant woman in El Salvador eloquently stated in the "People on War" survey, "[it] was terrible, because if you didn't sell tortillas to the guerrillas, they got mad, and if you didn't sell to the soldiers, they got mad, so you had to collaborate with both sides."⁷

Owing to the proximity of the fighting and/or the presence of the armed forces, women invariably have to restrict their movements; this severely limits their access to supplies of water, food, and medical assistance and their ability to tend their animals and crops, to exchange news and information and to seek community or family support.

Limited access to medical assistance can have an enormous impact on women, especially for reproductive and material health. Childbirth complications, arguably more likely in the stressful conditions of war, can lead to increased child and maternal mortality or sicknesses.

Women are all too often harassed, intimidated and attacked in their homes, while moving around their village and its environs and when passing checkpoints. A lack of identity documents - a problem experienced by many women who have lost, were previously never issued with or did not feel the need to have documentation in their own right - severely affects the personal security and freedom of movement of women, increasing their risk of abuse, including sexual violence.

Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought world recognition for the issue of the rape of women as a means of warfare. The world was horrified to hear accounts of women held in order to rape and to impregnate them.

Rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery and forced impregnation are violations of international humanitarian law and are now an undisputed part of the vocabulary of war. Not that they are "new" crimes. Who didn't learn in their history lessons of marauding armies entering the conquered towns on a rampage of "looting and raping"?⁸ But few of us were probably taught that "rape"

was a crime and can never be justified as a means of warfare or show of power, as a reward for the victorious army or as a lesson for the vanquished unable to protect their womenfolk.

In many conflicts women have been systematically targeted for sexual violence - sometimes with the broader political objective of ethnically cleansing an area or destroying a people. From Bangladesh to former Yugoslavia, from Berlin in World War II to Nanking under Japanese occupation, from Vietnam to Mozambique, from Afghanistan to Somalia, women and girls have been the victims of sexual violence in armed conflict (this is also true for men and boys, although even less is known about the extent of this problem).

It is not possible to give anything but estimates as to the number of victims of sexual violence (female or male, adult or child), as not all victims survive, and the majority of victims will never report the violation against them. Reliable statistics are not easy to obtain, and those available are often based on the numbers of victims seeking medical help for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or termination of pregnancy. The numbers of women seeking such assistance often become the basis upon which statistics are extrapolated. However, many women are generally too afraid to speak of their experiences for the very real fear of ostracism or retaliation by their family or community. Many also believe that no one can help them now that they have been violated. Moreover, the worst atrocities against the civilian and detainee populations (groups which are expressly protected under international humanitarian law) all too often occur when international organizations are not present to witness the violations, as was recently the case in Kosovo (during the period of the NATO air strikes), in Chechnya during the Russian military campaign, in rural areas of Sierra Leone and in numerous other conflicts around the world. Whilst recognizing that statistics on the numbers of victims of a crime like rape are invaluable in order to ensure effective support and assistance (the right help in the right places), statistics should not become the main issue. One person raped is one too many.

Sexual violence is a particularly brutal act against its victim. During the "People on War" survey undertaken by the ICRC in countries which had been or are still at war, one in nine of all respondents reported that they knew somebody who had been raped, and nearly as many reported that they knew somebody who had been sexually assaulted.⁹ This is shocking. States have a duty to ensure the protection of and respect for all civilians and persons no longer taking part in hostilities.

The ICRC has long considered sexual violence as a war

crime and a serious violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁰ At the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Geneva, 1999), the ICRC expressed once more its concern at the occurrence of sexual violence in armed conflict and pledged to States and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that it would place specific focus on making known to parties to armed conflicts the protection accorded to women by international humanitarian law, with emphasis on the issue of sexual violence.¹¹ The full implementation of international humanitarian law must become a reality, and the prime responsibility for achieving this rests with the parties to an armed conflict. They must observe the rules and take necessary action so that sexual violence does not occur, and they must bring the perpetrators to justice if such crimes are committed.

It is important to note the significant work of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, both of which have prosecuted and convicted perpetrators of sexual violence against women. In addition, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) also explicitly mentions sexual violence as a war crime.¹² These are significant developments in the battle against impunity.

Missing Persons and Widowhood

The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95) put the plight of women and the survivors of sexual violence onto the world agenda. Besides sexual violence, this war (like many others before and since) was characterized by the separation of men from women and children - both a voluntary and involuntary separation. Men took up fighting roles, fled to third countries and safe areas, or were rounded up and detained and/or killed in large numbers. Often women stayed to try to find out the fate and whereabouts of their male relatives, or to protect their property, initially believing that the war would not be long and that they would be spared. However, all sides in this conflict failed to protect and spare the lives of civilian men, women and children. Although the majority of the dead or missing were men (and mostly men of military age, even though many were not part of the armed forces), women were also killed or are still unaccounted for. There are still 18,292 persons,¹³ reported by their families to the ICRC, considered missing long after the end of the conflict. Of these, 91.7% are men and 8.1% are women.

The very fact that many women survive conflicts in which their menfolk have died or disappear has enormous implications. The wars in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Rwanda have highlighted the plight of widows and women desperately trying to ascertain the fate of their loved ones. The survivors of those wars - and others throughout the world - are now struggling to cope not

only with the difficulty of providing an immediate livelihood or means of survival for themselves and their family, but also with the additional trauma and uncertainty of not knowing what will happen to them in the absence of their menfolk. Widows and relatives of missing men - fathers, sons and husbands - may well be left without any entitlement to land, homes and inheritances, social assistance and pensions, or even the right to sign contracts. They and their children can be subjected to violence and ostracism as a result of their status.¹⁴

All over the world, tens of thousands of women are searching for news about the fate of missing relatives, and this search often goes on years after a conflict has ended. The inability to mourn and bury their loved ones has an enormous impact on the survivors and the coping mechanisms they adopt. Humanitarian law recognizes the need and right of families to obtain such information. The ICRC endeavours to find out about persons missing in relation to armed conflicts through the Red Cross family news network, visits to places of detention, enquiries in response to tracing requests and representations to the warring parties to clarify their fate. But all too frequently, parties to an armed conflict do not do enough in that regard, thereby prolonging the agony of war long after the fighting has ended. As one mother, whose son has been missing since 1991 as a result of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, so tragically exclaimed: "There used to be a saying around here that the worst thing which can happen to someone is to bury their own child. It seems nowadays that there is something far worse - not knowing what happened to him at all."¹⁵

Women everywhere are showing enormous courage and resilience as survivors and as heads of households - a role many of them had little or no preparation for and which is made more difficult by the social constraints often imposed on women. Many women have taken up this challenge and resolutely set aside their trauma in order to go on living for their children.

Displaced Women

As previously stated, women and children make up the majority of the world's refugees and displaced persons. Fleeing and living in displacement creates numerous problems for women around the world, and ironically often exposes women to enormous risks. Women generally flee taking few possessions with them and many become separated from family members. Displacement may well force women to become reliant on support from the local population in the area to which they are displaced, or on assistance from international and non-governmental organizations. They often have to travel long distances in their search for water, food, firewood, and for traditional foods and herbs for medicines for themselves and their



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

families. During this search women frequently risk attack and injury from fighting, mines and unexploded ordnance, as well as sexual abuse, especially rape.

Women display tremendous strength and resourcefulness in the coping mechanisms they adopt in trying to ensure their own survival and that of their family. However, women in camps for displaced persons are frequently vulnerable, especially when they are the head of the household, widows, pregnant women, mothers with small children and elderly, for they have to shoulder all the daily responsibilities for survival which consume enormous amounts of time and energy. Furthermore, they may be overlooked by camp authorities and organizations providing assistance because in many cultures women are not in the public sphere and often do not have their own identity documents, and because the special needs of women have not been taken into account. For example, pregnant women need greater access to health services and larger food rations. Women with children are also particularly concerned about their children's education and often have to find the means to pay for clothes and books, then must cope with increased workloads if their children are at school.

Women in situations of displacement also invariably lack the privacy needed to maintain their personal hygiene and dignity. As they have to share living quarters, washing and toilet facilities with many people (and which are frequently easily accessible to men), many women are forced to choose between maintaining personal hygiene and maintaining their dignity and security.

For these reasons, women need to be actively included in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities carried out and assistance distributed.

The ICRC assisted almost five million persons displaced by armed conflict in 1999. In the year 2000, it is working to protect and assist internally displaced persons in 31 countries throughout the world. In many of these countries, women have been specifically consulted by the ICRC as to what assistance should be distributed to whom, for example, to find out what would best meet the needs of households headed by women.

Women in Detention

Women are also detained as a result of conflict, often in worse conditions than men. This is primarily due to the

fact that the majority of detainees are men, and there are few prisons or places of detention solely for women. In many cases women detainees are consequently housed in the men's prison and, since they are fewer in number, their section is usually the smallest and lacks adequate sanitary and other facilities.

The existence of a separate prison for women can also lead to problems. As women generally constitute only a minority of detainees, few prisons are built specifically for them. This means that the nearest women's prison may be situated far from their home, and that by being sent there they are separated from their family and the support that families provide.

People in detention often rely heavily on their relatives to visit them and bring additional food and other items (medicines, clothes, toiletries, etc.). Women often suffer from a lack of family visits and therefore their family's support. There are many reasons for this: the remoteness of the place of detention, insecurity for visitors, relatives unwilling or unable (because they are displaced, have disappeared or are missing) to come, or lack of money to pay the travel costs.

Furthermore, women detainees often have the added concern of their children's well-being, either because young children are detained with them and are being raised in difficult conditions or because they have been separated from their children and are uncertain as to who is raising them and how. Even where a family member has taken over responsibility for the children, this enforced separation can be very difficult for women to bear.

Women also have specific needs which they find it hard to meet in detention. For instance, women and girls of menstruating age often have problems in obtaining suitable sanitary protection, regular access to sanitary facilities (toilets and washing areas) and appropriate clothing to deal with their menstruation in a manner that preserves their health and dignity.

Both men and women are often subjected to maltreatment, including sexual violence, whilst in detention. For women, there is a serious risk of pregnancy and gynecological problems, and fear of the consequences these may have both for their life in detention and after their release, when they return to their families and communities.

In 1999, the ICRC visited more than 225,000 detainees around the world, including some 6,300 women and more than 450 girls under 18 years of age. The majority of these women and girls were detained in relation to an armed conflict or situation of political violence. As a gen-

eral rule, the ICRC registers persons detained in relation to an armed conflict or other form of political violence, in particular prisoners of war, security detainees or civilian internees. It visits them (speaking to them in private without the presence of guards or authorities) to assess their conditions of detention and treatment. With the consent of the detaining authorities, it provides non-food assistance in the form of sanitary and hygienic requisites, such as sanitary protection for women, clothes, buckets, cooking pots and recreational items, as well as medical supplies (to the medical services).

The Protection of Women in International Humanitarian Law¹⁶

Ever since its inception, international humanitarian law has accorded women general protection equal to that of men.¹⁷ At the same time the humanitarian law treaties recognize the need to give women special protection according to their specific needs. This protection is enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the Protection of War Victims and their two Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977. The Conventions and Protocols protect women (and men) as members of the civilian population not taking part in an armed conflict. Women (and men) as members of the armed forces are also protected when captured by the enemy. Some of the key provisions of this law are outlined below.

The Law of International Armed Conflicts

Women who have taken an active part in hostilities as combatants are entitled to the same protection as men when they have fallen into enemy hands. The Third Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War stipulates that prisoners of war shall be treated humanely at all times. Besides this general protection, women are also afforded special protection based on the principle outlined in Article 14, paragraph 2, that "women shall be treated with all the regard due to their sex". This principle is followed through in a number of provisions which expressly refer to the conditions of detention for women in POW camps, e.g. the obligation to provide for separate dormitories for women and men¹⁸ and for separate sanitary conveniences.¹⁹ The principle of differentiated treatment for women also resulted in provisions relating to the separate confinement of women from men and the immediate supervision of women by women.²⁰

Women (and men) who, as members of the civilian population, are taking no active part in hostilities are afforded protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and under Additional Protocol I. Women are in general protected against abusive treatment by the parties to the armed conflict and also against the effects of the fighting.

They are entitled to humane treatment, respect for their life and physical integrity, and to live free from torture, ill-treatment, exactions and harassment. In addition to this general protection, women are afforded special protection under the said Convention and Protocol I, which stipulate that "[women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault".²¹

International humanitarian law also lays down special provisions for pregnant women and mothers of small children (generally considered to be children under seven years of age). It stipulates that they shall "benefit by any preferential treatment to the same extent as the nationals of the State concerned",²² pregnant women and nursing mothers "shall be given additional food, in proportion to their physiological needs",²³ pregnant women and mothers with dependent infants who are detained or interned should have their cases considered with the utmost priority,²⁴ and maternity cases must be "admitted to any institution where adequate treatment can be given".²⁵

Women are also protected, as members of the civilian population, against the effects of the hostilities, and there are rules which impose limits on the use of force. In the conduct of hostilities the parties to an armed conflict must "at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives".²⁶

The Law on Non-International Armed Conflicts

Women (and men) who take an active part in the hostilities in a non-international armed conflict do not have prisoner-of-war status when they fall into enemy hands. However, in such a case they are entitled to the fundamental guarantees afforded by Article 4 of Additional Protocol II relative to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts. Basically, they are entitled to the same protection as men, but they also have a right to special treatment.

Persons not taking part in such a conflict are protected by Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions. While it contains no special provision on the protection of women, this rule establishes fundamental guarantees for the treatment of all persons not taking part in the hostilities. Furthermore, Additional Protocol II stipulates in general terms that "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault" are forbidden.²⁷ Protocol II also provides for special treatment of women who are arrested, detained or interned in relation to the hostilities. In such cases, "except when men and women of a family are accommodated together,

er, women shall be held in quarters separated from those of men and shall be under the immediate supervision of women".²⁸

Women as members of the civilian population are also protected against the effects of hostilities in non-international conflicts. Article 13 of Protocol II stipulates that "the civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack".

Honour in International Humanitarian Law

Article 27 of the Fourth Convention uses the term "honour" when referring to the special protection conferred by international humanitarian law on women against attacks like "rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault". In recent years, some writers have voiced concern about the use of the word "honour" in relation to sexual violence, in that it fails to recognize the brutal nature of rape and uses instead a "value" term to define the interest to be protected rather than the woman herself, and for embodying the notion of women as property.²⁹

The question of honour - a term which is also used in other articles of the Geneva Conventions and not only in those pertaining to women - demands more examination than can be done in such a general article, covering so many aspects of women and war. However, to briefly touch upon this issue, honour is a code by which many men and women are raised, define and lead their lives. Therefore, the concept of honour is much more complex than merely a "value" term. But to a certain extent the concerns outlined above are valid. It is unfortunate that the language used by States fifty years ago, when the Geneva Conventions were written, links violations of a sexual nature with a woman's honour. This could lead to the question whether it is the honour of the woman international humanitarian law wants to protect or whether it is the woman herself? The answer is clearly the latter.

If one looks at Article 27 as a whole it is clear that the law grants "protected persons, in all circumstances, respect for their persons (...). They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof... This protection is conferred on both men and women, adult and child, and was intended to be as broad as possible encompassing all acts of violence and threats thereto. The second paragraph of this provision, referring to special protection for women, aims to strengthen this protection by highlighting sexual violence. However, linking sexual violence and honour has made it seem to some that this provision is less about a physical protection for women and more about a value judgement. Since the Geneva Conventions were drafted, law and language have evolved, as Article 76 of

Additional Protocol I clearly shows. The 156 States parties to this Protocol³⁰ attest to its universality. Article 76 confers protection to women in the power of a party to the conflict (a broad field of application). It states that "[women shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected in particular against rape, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault." There is no mention of the term "honour".

In conclusion, the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols stipulate that women must be respected and protected against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault. In order to strengthen their protection, it is this part of the law which must be emphasized, disseminated and enforced during situations of armed conflict. For its part, the ICRC has pledged that over the next four years it will focus its particular attention on this very issue.³¹

Recent ICRC Initiatives

The ICRC initiated a study in 1998 to better identify the ways in which women are affected by armed conflicts, and to determine whether its own response could be improved. The study, which will be concluded this year, aims to: (1) identify the needs of women, including their access to basic goods and services such as food, water, shelter and health care; (2) draw up a realistic and comprehensive picture of ICRC activities in favour of women affected by armed conflict, and assess whether these activities adequately respond to the needs identified; and (3) examine international humanitarian law, in order to assess the extent to which it provides adequate coverage of the needs identified. Information has been provided by ICRC delegations around the world, as well as firsthand information provided by war-affected women themselves through the "People on War" survey, adding an invaluable dimension to the study.³² The ICRC plans to present an initial draft of it to practitioners and experts later this year. On the basis of the study's findings, the ICRC will formulate guidelines to enhance the protection and assistance of women affected by armed conflict. This ICRC initiative was supported at the 27th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference, held in Geneva in 1999, by States party to the Geneva Conventions and by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.³³

Furthermore, the pledge made at the International Conference renewed the ICRC's commitment to the effective protection of women.³⁴ This pledge is intended not only to promote the respect to be accorded to women and girl children affected by armed conflict, but also to make sure that the specific needs of women and girls are appropriately assessed in the ICRC's own operations. ICRC delegations around the world have been instructed to focus increased attention upon the needs of

women affected by armed conflict and to adapt where necessary the ICRC's activities and programmes to ensure that they are met.

This study, the planned guidelines and the pledge made by the ICRC are parts of a long-term commitment to better assist and protect women in armed conflict. The ICRC hopes that these initiatives will lead to more effective implementation in future of the protection conferred upon women by humanitarian law. However, the prime responsibility rests with the parties to an armed conflict, namely to observe the rules, and with States, namely to bring the perpetrators of violations of these rules to justice.

Conclusion

War, whether international or non-international, causes extreme suffering for those caught up in it. Women experience war in a multitude of ways - from taking an active part as combatants to being targeted as members of the civilian population specifically because they are women. But war for women is not just rape - fortunately many women do not experience this heinous violation; it is also separation, the loss of family members and the very means of existence, it is injury and deprivation. War forces women into previously unaccustomed roles and necessitates the development of new coping skills.

Today more than ever, States and parties to an armed conflict must do their utmost to uphold respect for the safety and dignity of women in wartime, and women themselves must be more closely involved in all the measures taken on their behalf. Every State bound by the treaties of international humanitarian law has the duty to promote the rules protecting women from any form of violence in war, and should crimes occur, to bring the perpetrators to justice. If women have to bear so many of the tragic effects of armed conflict, it is not primarily because of any shortcomings in the rules protecting them, but because these rules are all too often not observed. The general and specific protection to which women are entitled must become a reality. Constant efforts must be made to promote knowledge of and compliance with the obligations of international humanitarian law by as wide an audience as possible and using all available means. The responsibility for improving the plight of women in times of war must be shared by everyone.

* Reprinted with permission from ICRC and the author. First published in *International Review of the Red Cross* No. 839, p. 561-579 (30-09-2000) by Charlotte Lindsey *Women and War - An overview*: This article aims to draw attention to the multifaceted ways in which women experience armed conflict and, to a limited extent, to some of the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist and protect women.

End Notes

1. See Françoise Krill, "The protection of women in international humanitarian law", *IRRC*, No. 249, November-December 1985, pp. 337-363.
2. Greg Siegle, "Women critical to success of US all-volunteer force", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 23, 23 June 1999.
3. David Hirst, "Ethiopia: Human waves fall as war aims unfold", *The Guardian*, 18 May 1999.
4. Dexter Filkins, "Sri Lanka women at war", *Herald Tribune*, 13 March 2000.
5. Dr Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide terrorism: a global threat", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 2000.
6. The People on War Report: ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war, ICRC, Geneva, 1999 (available on request from the ICRC, Geneva, website www.onwar.org). — To mark the 50th anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions the ICRC launched a consultation in 17 countries, 12 of which were or had been at war, giving the general public a chance to express their opinions on war.
7. *Supra* note 6.
8. On rape in war see in general Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1975. — Note that "looting and raping", one a property crime and the other a direct and violent attack on a person, are often linked together as violations in war.
9. *Supra* note 6.
10. See in particular: Statement before the Commission for Rights of Women, European Parliament, Brussels, 18 February 1993: "Le CICR a dénoncé la pratique du viol commis par toutes les parties au conflit, comme les autres exactions commises à l'encontre des civils. Le viol est considéré comme un crime de guerre et il est grand temps de trouver des solutions permettant de mettre un terme à ces pratiques inacceptables." — Resolution 2 B of the 26th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva, 1995): "[The Conference] (a) expresses its outrage at practices of sexual violence in armed conflicts, in particular the use of rape as an instrument of terror, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault; ... (c) strongly condemns sexual violence, in particular rape, in the conduct of armed conflict as a war crime, and under certain circumstances a crime against humanity, and urges the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms to investigate, bring to justice and punish all those responsible." — ICRC Update on the Aide-Memoire on rape committed during the armed conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, of 3 December 1992: "As never before in its history, the ICRC has spoken out forcefully against systematic and serious abuses committed against the civilian population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as... rape, internment, deportation, harassment of minority groups..." The act of rape is an extremely serious violation of international humanitarian law. Article 27, para. 2, of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: "Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault."
11. This pledge was announced by the President of the ICRC at the 27th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva, 1999). See ICRC web site www.icrc.org/eng/women
12. See the ICRC's submission to the Preparatory Commission for the ICC regarding the determination of the elements of crimes. On file with the ICRC.
13. In addition to these persons reported missing, the Bosnia-Herzegovina authorities believe that there are a further 10,000 persons unaccounted for.
14. See ICRC website for report on ICRC workshop on "widowhood and armed conflict" held in November 1999, Geneva.
15. Quoted from "The issue of missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", ICRC Special Report, 1998.
16. See in general Krill, *op. cit.* (note 1).
17. International humanitarian law is not the only body of law relevant to situations of armed conflict, human rights law is also applicable. These two bodies of law should not be seen as mutually exclusive, and their methods of implementation should be seen as complementary.
18. (Third) Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Art. 25(4).
19. *Ibid.*, Art. 29(2).
20. *Ibid.*, Arts 97 and 108, Additional Protocol I, Art. 75(5).
21. (Fourth) Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Art. 27(2). See also Additional Protocol I, Arts 75 and 76.
22. Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 38.
23. *Ibid.*, Art. 89.
24. Additional Protocol I, Art. 76(2).
25. Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 91.
26. Additional Protocol I, Art. 48.
27. Additional Protocol II, Art. 4(2)(e).
28. *Ibid.*, Art. 5(2)(a).
29. See in particular Catherine N. Niarchos, "Women, war and rape: challenges facing the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 17, 1995, pp. 671-676, and Judith Gardam, "Women, human rights and international humanitarian law", *IRRC*, No. 324, September 1998, pp. 421-432.
30. As at 15 May 2000.
31. The ICRC has committed itself for the next four years to increase its dissemination of knowledge of the protection which should be accorded to women and girl children, especially with regard to sexual violence, among parties to armed conflicts throughout the world. *Supra* note 11.
32. *Supra* note 6.
33. Resolution 1: Plan of Action for the years 2000-2003, 27th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva, 1999).
34. *Supra* note 11.

Kurdish Women in the Zone of Genocide and Gendercide

■ Shahrazad Mojab

Associate professor and director, Institute of Women's Studies and Gender Studies, University of Toronto

The first political struggles for women's emancipation coincide with the rise of nations, nationalism, and the nation-state during the bourgeois democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century. This formation of modern nation states has generally been associated with the use of violence. War, massacre, genocide, and ethnic cleansing are some of the forms of violence used by both pre-modern and modern states throughout the world. All these forms of violence have been patriarchal. State violence and patriarchal violence have been and still are inseparable.

Genocide, i.e. the deliberate elimination of an entire people or part of it, has been perpetrated during the formation of many modern states. It is common knowledge that war-mongers have subjected women to the violence of rape in order to tame or punish the adversary. In some cases, e.g. the formation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by the Taliban, violence against women took genocidal proportions. This form of violence has been recently conceptualized as a concept that is beginning to gain currency.

This debate was best summarized in a recent issue of *Journal of Genocide Research*, published in March 2002.

The term was first used by Mary Anne Warren in her book entitled *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*. Contributors to the special issue of the *Journal of Genocide Research*, however, attempt to expand Warren's initial conceptualization of gendercide by supporting Adam Jones' earlier claim that Warren's analysis was limited to "anti-female gendercide" (Jones, 2000:186). Much of this literature is an in-depth sociological approach to the analysis of genocide and its specific gendered component. The debate evolves around some of the original feminist distinctions between 'sex' as a basis for biological differences versus 'gender' as a sociological differentiation (see Holter, Stein, and Jones in the special issue). There seems, however, to be a consensus on avoiding the dichotomization of 'sex' and 'gender' and considering them in a more relational association. Thus, an overall critique of genocide studies is that it has paid little attention to the implications of the mass-killing of men and boys in conflict situations as a matter of policy or conceptualization.

This body of literature is strong in its historical review of genocidal cases from antiquity to Nazism, Rwanda, and Kosovo. These cases are also presented in light of international treaties and UN conventions, consequently

enriching the analysis by documenting its complexity. The authors identify further international and comparative studies as a research goal in this area. Nonetheless, I concur with Stuart Stein's conclusion that this crowded conceptual domain "...is largely a means of naming, or characterizing, instances of, or clusters of mass killings" (Stein, 2002: 57 and 55). The concept does, however, allow fresh insight into mass-scale violence against women. There is still much work to be done in order to enhance both the theorization of this concept as well as develop an appropriate comparative methodology.

In this paper, I will simply look at gendercide as mass killing of women, although mass killing of men, as such, also occurs. My emphasis will be on the following three points: 1) gendercide happens at times of both peace and war, 2) patriarchal culture and state- and nation-building are two sources of female specific genocide, and 3) studying forms of local and global feminist resistance can assist us in creating a viable global feminist peace strategy.

Kurdish Women in the 'Zone of Genocide'

This paper is a study of gendercide in the war zone of Iraqi Kurdistan, where women have been subjected to varying degrees of violence. I will try to provide an historical sketch of this violence from a feminist-Marxist perspective. I will begin with the Ottoman Empire, which at the peak of its power included North Africa, the Balkans, parts of Eastern Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, and today's Turkey and Iraq. This state was formed five centuries ago and was dismantled during World War I.

There is a popular myth about the Ottoman state: Turkish nationalists and many Western historians claim that the Ottoman state was pluralistic and allowed non-Muslim peoples religious freedoms. This was based on the *millet system*; a *millet* meant a "religious community." According to this myth, all non-Muslim *millets* enjoyed the right to maintain and practice their religion. There is, indeed, a certain truth in this myth. The non-Muslim communities had the freedom to practice their religion. But there are two major fabrications about the practices of this empire. First, the subjects of the empire, Muslim and non-Muslim, were continuously subjected to massacres. Second, all pre-modern empires were decentralized; they did not have the power or means to eliminate autonomous or semi-independent principalities. If we look at the history of the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of Armenian and Assyrian Christians and even Muslim Kurds, the claim about the pluralism of the Ottoman state is nothing more than an invention. In fact, Mark Levene, a scholar of genocide studies, has shown that the modernization of the Ottoman state that began the Nineteenth century entailed the creation of a Zone of

Genocide in the Eastern provinces of the empire. In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman state began the systematic massacre of Armenians and in 1915 eliminated the Armenian people. The Assyrians, too, were eliminated during World War I. Although the Ottomans used the Kurds against the Armenians and Assyrians, the Kurds themselves were subjected to several genocidal campaigns. The worst came in 1936-1937, in the genocide of Dersim. In Iraq, which Britain carved out of the Ottoman state in 1917, the government of Saddam Hussein conducted a genocide of the Kurds in 1988. This genocide, now well documented, was code-named Anfal. The word Anfal means "spoils of war" and was borrowed from the Quran.

Furthermore, I will argue that Western colonialism is equally rooted in genocidal violence. Western colonialism was a product of the rise of capitalism. The elimination of many indigenous peoples in the Americas and the rest of the world was part of the formation of modern empires. In more recent times, the German state under the rule of Nazis eliminated millions of Jews, gays, communists, and disabled people. The Holocaust was a product of one of the most "civilized nations" in Europe.

I contend that there are a number of enduring war zones in the Middle East and North Africa, including Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, Kurdistan (especially, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran), and Sudan, where populations are, at times, targeted as members of a particular gender. In Afghanistan, the gender policies of the Taliban regime and its rival warlords constituted gender-selective violence against women. Branded as an inferior gender, women were subdued physically, psychologically, morally, and culturally. While the extremism of this case is perhaps unprecedented in the modern Middle East, other cases of war-related gender-centered mass killing occurred in Iraqi Kurdistan. The extensive self-immolation of women and honor killing in Iraq (in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War) may also be considered as conditions of gendercide. While gendercide may happen in times of peace, it occurs more often under conditions of genocide, ethnic conflict, and ethnic cleansing. The region extending from Kashmir and Pakistan in the east to Cyprus and Sudan in the West constitutes the world's main war zone, where actual and potential armed conflicts are under way. Kurdistan is part of a region in West Asia, which has been part of the "zone of genocide" since the beginning of genocidal campaigns against the Armenian people in 1878. Research on the gender component of this war zone is necessary not only as a contribution to academic knowledge but also for the promotion of peace, gender equality, and human rights. We need to promote the understanding of the gendered nature of mass killing, which was ignored in the 1948

UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The Non-State Nation of the Kurds

The Kurdish people who live in Western Asia were the original inhabitants of Kurdistan, which according to Levene, lies in a zone of genocide. They are the largest non-state nation in the world with a population of about 25 million who were forcibly divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. They have survived two major genocides and many genocidal campaigns.

During the Gulf War of 1991, which was led by President George Bush, the United States encouraged the Kurds of Iraq to revolt against Baghdad. When they revolted, President Bush left them to their own devices. The Iraqi army attacked them and some three million escaped into the snow covered mountains in late March and April 1991. The United States refused to take any responsibility for this, arguing that this was an ancient tribal war. When forced into action because of the presence of TV cameras and public opinion, the US and Britain created a so-called Safe Haven for them, with a no-fly zone that was guarded by the American and British air forces.

The disruption of the lives of millions of people in this part of Kurdistan continued to be a disaster. The Kurds suffered from the embargo on Iraq, and the embargo of Iraq on the Kurds, and the tripled embargo by neighboring states on the landlocked Kurdish "safe haven." Iraqi Kurdistan which has been a war zone since 1961, thus continued to be in a state of intermittent war. A visible change in the course of forty years of war was the turning of this part of the "zone of geno-

cide" into a "zone of gendercide." Hundreds of women were killed for reasons of honor (Mojab, forthcoming). No one in the region can remember anything like this in living memory.

Who was responsible for the creation of a "zone of gendercide" in Iraqi Kurdistan? There is no doubt that the Gulf War of 1991 was its main origin. I visited Northern Iraq in October 2000, almost a decade after the war. In telling the story of my visit, I have often said that all sides, including Iraq, Turkey, Iran, the U.S., the U.N., the Kurdish political parties in power, and the NGOs, were in one way

or another involved in prolonging the condition of 'gendercide' of Kurdish women. This was my impression based on intensive observation and detailed discussions with people from all walks of life. In other words, I would like to suggest that what happened in Iraqi Kurdistan can be best comprehended as the workings of a national, regional, and international order. Let me present part of my story before further analyzing the situation.

A Decade of 'Safe Haven': Visiting Iraqi Kurdistan²

The markets in Sulaimanyya and other major cities such as Dehok and Zakho were saturated with imported goods, which include massive quantities of packaged food and snacks such as Kitkat, Sneakers, gums, chips as well as drinks like Cool Aid and a variety of other pop drinks. At the entrance of Dehok, there was a major shopping center, modeled after western chain stores, whose food section included a variety of imported jams and pickles sold in bulk. Jamming and pickling are among the household activities with significant social implications for women. Often, they are done collectively and are a source of women's socializing. The store also had a huge section for electronics, largely of the most up-to-date technology. The massive presence of synthetic materials such as artificial flowers and plastic household items was noteworthy. It was the presence of military type toys that I found most jarring. Almost life-size Kalashnikovs, handguns, and plastic hand grenades were juxtaposed with glittering Ken and Barbie dolls.

On the street of Zakho another market of imported western goods was noticeable. Along a large section of the main street, all western donated clothes and other items such as blankets, towels, or sheets were sorted out and arranged in a pile; men's jean pants were on one pile, men's shirts on another, and so were women's and children's items. The donated items were for sale. One could observe this sidewalk sale from the windows of a hotel where a wall-size TV screen was the dominant feature in its small lobby. This cultural medium broadcast, round the clock, mostly erotic or pornographic music shows and programs from Turkey. The rest of the screening time was filled with mindless American style TV game shows, sitcoms, or soap operas. Men were the main consumers of this cultural entity. In my short stay in that hotel, I did not run into another woman. The hotel was packed with men, mainly truck drivers who were stranded on the border of Iraq and Turkey, at the customs post known as Ebrahim Khalil. It often took as long as a month for these trucks to get customs clearance. This length of stay would necessitate the use of city services, including hotels, restaurants, and long-distance tele-communication. This had also contributed to the growth of prostitution in the city. Although most people, when asked, confirmed the rise of prostitution, nevertheless, it was not a

'service' which was talked about openly. The Ministry of Labor and Social Services, which was in charge of all the destitute social groups such as orphans, martyr families, internally displaced people, and women, did not have adequate information on the status of prostitution in Northern Iraq. In fact, in my conversation with the minister, I got the impression that the issue of prostitution was much underplayed: Neither accurate information nor social planning to deal with it existed at that time.

The destruction of the social fabric of life in Iraqi Kurdistan was most obvious in the kilometers of trucks lined up at the border of Iraq and Turkey. Eighteen wheeler-trucks were parked bumper to bumper, at times in double rows, on both sides of the road, leaving only one-way traffic possible. The line-up passed through many small villages and attracted the village population to engage in road-side commodity exchange. This involved children as young as five years, girls and boys, as well as elderly men and women. The road-side vending service included hair cutting, food, tobacco, snacks, some bathing equipment (towels and shaving utensils for men), and clothing. In certain spots, one could see a large number of children climbing all over the impressive eighteen-wheelers oil-tank trucks as if they were playing on playground equipment. The attraction of this road-side vending had emptied villages of their working population and halted whatever was left of local farming production.

The presence of the trucks at the border was not the only factor destroying agrarian production in Iraqi Kurdistan. Several other factors, including the import of cheap wheat, rice, and other grains, had forced local farming to vanish. Farmers could not sell their products at a price that competed with imported cheap American rice or wheat. In November 2001, the Washington Kurdish Institute Advisory Board wrote a report entitled "The contradiction between UN Resolution 986 and the so called Safe Haven for Kurds." The WKI reports indicate that "There is another contradiction that stands in the way of rehabilitating rural Kurdistan and encouraging the rural population to go back to their ruined villages to resume their farming practices: The Baghdad regime obstructs any attempt by the Regional Government and the Food Agencies to purchase what is produced locally instead importing everything at the Baghdad Government's whim." The nutritious value of the imported grains was poor and thus contributed to the decline in the population's health.

One of the most valuable lessons in this trip for me was a deeper understanding of the role of the United Nations as an emerging colonial power. This was echoed by most Kurds as well as Kurdish authorities. The problems were the UN's large bureaucracy, corruption, and lack of

accountability. There was a lack of coordination among UN agencies, lack of sufficient authority and technical capacity among UN staff, and intimidation of UN staff by the Iraqi government whenever they became too friendly with the Kurds. I will turn now to Westwood and Phizacklea (2000: 1) in order to depict the UN's colonial relations in Northern Iraq. They use the term transnationalism in order to "... draw attention to the two processes which are simultaneously at work. On the one hand the continuing importance of the nation and the emotional attachments invested in it, and on the other hand those processes such as cross-border migration which are transnational in form." These two processes apply to the Kurds, who routinely cross international borders if they want to move from one part of Kurdistan to the other or if they want to enter Kurdistan from their diasporas. There is a strong element of cultural and emotional ties in this process, without which the pain of this border crossing becomes intolerable. Let me describe the scene of entering Kurdistan at a point where the borders of the three surrounding nation-states Syria, Turkey, and Iraq converge. The distance that I had to travel in order to enter Kurdistan was less than one kilometer, including passing through a river. I had to go through three check points and collect proper signatures before being able to proceed. At each point I was charged certain amounts of cash; the only acceptable currency was the US dollar. After passing through the ground check points on one side, there was a small motorboat that carried passengers and their luggage to the other side, and the same process was repeated, this time inside Iraqi Kurdistan. The flag of Kurdistan and a big banner which read 'Welcome to Kurdistan,' marked the Kurdish immigration and customs building on the other side.

The short boat ride and the arrival on the other side were quite an experience. Kurds arriving

with family members and massive luggage from Europe were all loaded onto the small boat to its fullest capacity, to the extent that the edge of the boat touched the water. A sizeable crowd of relatives and friends was waiting to receive them on the other side of the river. It was an emotional encounter. They were exhausted; on average, they have been traveling for three days, flying from Europe to a major city in Turkey or Syria and then a land trip to the border, then the boat ride and another land trip to their

The case of Kurdistan shows that patriarchal violence cannot be reduced to the action of a single male person ...

home town or village within Kurdistan. The boat only operates at certain times of the day. It usually began around 9:00 a.m. and only brought passengers arriving from outside of Kurdistan. For security purposes, they wanted to reduce the population movement to a manageable size. Then, between noon and 3:00 p.m., it carried the departing passengers. There were exceptions, which only applied to European nationals, in particular the UN staff. The differential treatment of Kurds and non-Kurds at the border crossing was a reminder of the deep-rooted colonial mentality. Let me expand on this point. While I was waiting for my turn to cross the river under scorching heat, I noticed that suddenly the entire operation was halted for a while. A UN van arrived and parked with its back door open to the water. The driver passed four safety jackets with the Netherlands flag marked on them to the small boat operator. The boat crossed the river, this time with no passengers, and a few minutes later, returned with four Dutch passengers all wearing safety jackets, who immediately climbed into the waiting UN van. The Kurdish passengers observing the scene were disturbed by the differential treatment of western citizens.

Forms of Women's Resistance³

If war unleashed more violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan, it also produced resistance against violence. In Kurdistan, individuals and organizations have participated in protests against male violence. Some of these organizations have offered support services. The Women's Union of

Kurdistan, established in November 1989, has promoted women's rights, and helped vulnerable women cope with trauma.

The Independent Women's Organization (IWO), formed in May 1993, has been active in exposing honor killing and other forms of violence. In March 1998, it opened a Women's Shelter Center in Sulaimanyya, which saved many lives. In 1999, this group of activists, affiliated with the Workers

Communist Party of Iraq, launched from London an International Campaign for the Defence of Women's Rights in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to their newsletter, the shelter handled 233 cases in six months in 1999: 18 women were murdered, 57 threatened with killing, 38 committed suicide, 69 suffered from different pressures, six were raped, and three were dismembered. In February 2000 the representative of IWO in Britain wrote a letter to UN secretary general Kofi Annan to seek the

UN's support in replacing the Iraqi Personal Status Law and the Penal Law in Kurdistan. It also launched an international petition campaign against these laws. The IWO has used the network of women's groups around the world as well as internet possibilities to collect petitions and mobilize international women's and human rights groups in support of Kurdish women.

The Women's Union of Kurdistan established in April 4, 1997 in Sulaimanyya the Women's Information Center with a mandate to educate women about their rights through media campaigns, and to provide leadership training for women. The Center has been active in organizing panel discussions, holding seminars on violence against women, and organizing March 8th rallies. In a campaign against honor killing, it collected 50,025 signatures. It also formed a committee in defence of Kajal Khidir, and participated actively in the court case of Sabiha Abdulla Ahmed, who was shot dead by an armed group with the assistance of her husband on October 14, 1997. In a memorandum to the President of the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the Center presented the following demands:

1. Eradication of tribal family relations, which treat women as property.
2. Prohibiting violence against women by bringing murderers to trial; this includes trying even those who express the intention of killing women.
3. Kurdish political parties should not turn into the sanctuary of killers. Political parties which shelter killers should be considered as accomplices in the crime.
4. Abolishing the Iraqi state's Personal Status Law.

Equally significant is growing Kurdish women's activism in the diaspora, including a seminar organized by Kurdish Women Action Against Honor Killings in London on June 18, 2000. Attended by Kurdish specialists, lawyers, activists, and others, it provided yet another public recognition of the widespread phenomenon of 'honor' killing in Iraqi Kurdistan. January 2003 marked the first anniversary of the killing of Fadime Ôahindal, who was murdered by father in Uppsala, Sweden (Mojab and Hassanpour 2002a and 2002b). With the passing of the second anniversary of Fadime's death, I regret to report the loss of even more lives in both Kurdistan and Europe. Nevertheless, Kurdish women in Europe are determined to continue their struggle against patriarchal violence. They organized, for example, a conference where they brought together academics, activists, and politicians from Europe and the Kurdish region in order to stop 'honor killing.'

Another indication of resistance and growing consciousness among women is the formation of a Kurdish

Women's Press in the 1990s. Most of the journals are published in Iraqi Kurdistan, Europe, and Turkey by women's organizations affiliated with political parties. While it is difficult to ascertain a vibrant feminist "public sphere," in this press some of these periodicals break the silence and a few actively fight against patriarchal violence. This pressure and lobbying led to modest legal reforms in the eastern region of Iraqi Kurdistan in early 2000.

Conclusions: Conceptual, Theoretical and Policy Issues

The term gendercide allows a theoretical breakthrough in understanding violence against women. The case of Kurdistan shows that patriarchal violence cannot be reduced to the action of a single male person, although such individual acts certainly occur on a large scale. Also, women are not always targeted as individuals. Gendercide offers a crucial conceptual opening by emphasizing mass violence against women as a matter of policy by the state, by non-state communities, by religious establishments, and/or by the military at war.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the honor killing and self-immolation condoned or tolerated by the Kurdish administration may

be viewed as gendercide or conditions of gendercide. These forms of violence cannot be adequately explained within the framework of current conceptualizations of "violence against women." The concept gendercide thus allows a refinement of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide by adding a gender element to the definition of the term. Article II of the Convention defines genocide as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, as such:

- (A) killing members of the group;
- (B) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group;
- (C) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part ...

The concept gendercide adds gender to "national, ethnical, racial or religious groups." It offers fresh opportunities for activism to prevent gendercide, for policy making, and for theorization of state and nation-building.

End Notes

1. Over the years there is much debate in academia as well as among the Kurdish politicians and activists, on the scope and nature of Kurdish political autonomy in Northern Iraq. This political entity has been variously named as 'de-fact UN state,' 'Kurdish Authorities' or 'Regional Government of Kurdistan'(Bring 1992 and Falk 1994). Recently Natasha Carver raises question about the statehood status of the Kurds in Northern Iraq (Carver 2002).
2. The situation in Northern Iraq has changed considerably since my visit. This rapid change in the political scene of the region is a response to recent development in the US plan in re-mapping the Middle East. For more recent account of the situation in Northern Iraq see Chris Kutschera (2002).
3. For a list and website addresses of some of the Kurdish women's organization and activism check the following website:

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In Kurdistan, individuals and organizations have participated in protests against male violence.

Past and Future Struggles: Palestinian Women Negotiate Violent Conflict

■ Maria Holt

Information officer at the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding

On 6 September 2003 Palestinian women in the West Bank town of Tulkarem organized a demonstration of more than 200 Palestinian, Israeli and international women to protest against the Apartheid Wall that is being built by Israel in the occupied territories. Their action should not surprise us as Palestinian women are well known for their active participation in resisting the occupation. Given the severity of their situation, they have little choice but to focus first and foremost on the national struggle. But does this mean that “women’s issues” will inevitably be sidelined? Are such concerns a luxury, to be attended to once the serious business of war is ended?

Theories of war tend to concentrate on women as victims of armed conflict, but this is by no means the whole story. In this article, I want to look at ways in which Palestinian women have been victimized by war but, equally importantly, at ways in which they have developed sources of strength. I will argue that the tension inherent in their multiple roles has resulted in the emergence of a female “model of resistance”,¹ with the skills and determination to develop her own agenda in a future Palestinian state.

Theories of Women and War

When considering the participation of women in armed conflict, we should bear in mind the argument that, while war “can be regarded as the cornerstone of masculinity... participation in war... is not normally considered a significant event in the social identity construction process of women”.² In war, women experience various levels of vulnerability. When the men of the community are on the battlefield, or have been imprisoned or killed, women find themselves without protection and are more likely to be victimized by the enemy and even by members of their own community. Since women act as symbols, both of the identity and the honor of their group, they are liable to become targets of enemy aggression. Many women suffer feelings of fear, powerlessness and depression, which inevitably have an impact on their coping mechanisms.

Violence lies at the heart of this debate. Fear of violence “limits women’s freedom of movement”³ and such fears become even more pronounced during periods of conflict. Both men and women “suffer in a world permeated by violence”. However, “in the main, their experiences of violence differ. Men are involved more with the direct violence of armed combat”.⁴ It is certainly the case

that women are more likely to be disadvantaged – whether as rape victims, refugees or war widows – by violence in conflict.

But to what extent can one generalize? In some cases, for example that of the Palestinians, an entire population is under siege and everyone is rendered powerless while, in other cases, the women of the community choose to involve themselves in the struggle in a positive way. Women take part in conflict for a number of reasons: out of a sense of duty or loyalty to their country, or because they believe it will lead to a better life for their children. Their involvement may stem from the general mobilization of the group or from a personal belief that action is necessary. More often than not, women are caught up in conflict because they have no choice. Modes of involvement vary from gender-appropriate activities such as child-care, social support and tending the sick and injured, to agitation and political activity, and, in some instances, armed combat.

There has been much general theorizing about how men manage violent conflicts and how women endure them, much of it relating to the broad themes of male power and female passivity. There is evidence that, at times when legal protection is absent, some men take advantage of the situation to reinforce their dominance within the family. For example, in Northern Ireland, the “interaction of militarism and masculinity... means that there is a much wider tendency to use or to threaten to use guns in the control and abuse of women within the context of domestic violence”.⁵ One result of this is that women experience feelings of confusion between identification with the larger community and the fear of violence within their own private domain. It has been argued, too, that when conflict “intrudes into the society – as in the case of invasion or colonialism – it may become very difficult to maintain traditional social order”.⁶

A History of Violence and Activism

Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been living a war situation for over fifty years. They have been exposed to various levels of vulnerability, as a result of Israeli violence, which has intruded into all aspects of their lives. But they have also developed formidable coping mechanisms. Their involvement in the liberation struggle has forced them from their homes to confront the Israeli enemy. They have had no choice but to learn the skills necessary to protect their children.

From the beginning of the 20th century, what may be termed “resistance” activities by Palestinian women have passed through several stages. They began as charitable and social welfare work by a small group of upper and middle class ladies. After World War I, women took part

in demonstrations against British policies in Palestine. Although Palestinian women’s activity during the British Mandate period has been described as “politically unaware,” these women “established an organized and often militant movement that was actively involved in social, political, and national affairs.”⁷ During the nakbah (catastrophe) of 1948, when the State of Israel was established, over 750,000 Palestinians fled from their land. The dispossessed community was deeply traumatized. Losing Palestine, in the words of one woman, “was like losing a husband or a son.”⁸ In this environment, women became the principal symbols of Palestinian identity.

As time passed, Palestinians grew determined to resist the occupation of their land, if necessary by force. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 and, under its umbrella in 1965, the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). During the late 1960s and 1970s, through armed resistance activities and the building of national institutions, Palestinians transformed themselves from an unresolved refugee problem into a self-conscious national entity. The attitudes of women were also changing.

In the wake of the 1967 war, in which Israel seized control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, women organized themselves to provide support services to the population. The occupation brought “a more intimate form of oppression as the occupying forces entered homes and harassed even women and children.”⁹ This “intensified Palestinian nationalism in gendered ways by provoking a politicized response to the invasion of the private sphere.”¹⁰ In the occupied territories, Palestinian women developed new organizations in the 1970s, affiliated to the main political factions. These were radically different from earlier organizations, which were on the whole run by urban middle class women and had tended to focus on welfare concerns. In contrast the “women’s work committees stressed forming cooperatives for food processing and for agricultural products... Most importantly, they engaged women in political discussions which soon turned into discussions about women’s issues and women’s rights.”¹¹

With the start of the *intifada* in 1987 came unfamiliar – although equally urgent – roles for women. The early days of the *intifada* were, in many ways, an exhilarating time for women as they participated, for example, in the construction of alternative educational facilities, as schools were closed all over the occupied territories. Girls and women also took part in spontaneous confrontations with Israeli troops on the streets of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It seemed to many women that the struggle for women’s rights was proceeding alongside the national struggle; increasing numbers were

engaging in feminist debate. During this period, “the large-scale political mobilisation of Palestinian women was not perceived as a challenge to social stability but rather as a necessary and valuable contribution to the national struggle.”¹² But it was also an insecure period in which Israeli repression grew progressively harsher and collective punishment became routine.

By the early 1990s, in the view of Hamami and Kuttab, two negative trends began to emerge. The first was some adverse social effects on women of the intifada, in terms of control over women’s mobility, constraints on women’s behaviour, and a tendency towards earlier marriage for girls. Second, it was becoming apparent that the national issue could easily be hijacked “by an ideology that saw women’s political activism not as a contribution to national liberation but as a threat to it.” Women activists were being physically attacked by young men in the name of religion and Islamic dress was being imposed on women.¹³

In September 1993, to the surprise of many observers, the government of Israel and the PLO signed a Declaration of Principles (known as the Oslo Accords), which gave Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip limited autonomy. Many saw this as a decisive move towards the creation of an independent state in the occupied territories, and Palestinians began to work towards self-government. Planning failed, however, to take into account women’s aspirations for equal rights of citizenship. The new Palestinian Authority (PA), headed by Yasir Arafat, was almost exclusively male and the proposed constitution largely ignored women’s concerns.

In response, women’s groups produced a Declaration of Principles on Women’s Rights, which states: “We, the women of Palestine, from all social categories and the various faiths, including workers, farmers, housewives, students, professionals, and politicians, promulgate our determination to proceed without struggle to abolish all forms of discrimination and inequality against women, which were propagated by the different forms of colonialism on our land, ending with the Israeli Occupation, and which were reinforced by the conglomeration of customs and traditions prejudiced against women, embodied in a number of existing laws and legislation.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, developments were interrupted in September 2000, when a second *intifada* erupted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This has been very different from the first uprising, especially for women. In the words of a West Bank woman: “During the first *intifada*, it was easier for women to take part in protests... But in this latest struggle, because the Israelis used guns and tanks so quickly, women have kept back.”¹⁵

Negative Impacts of War on Palestinian Women

The long conflict, and particularly the current situation, have had a negative impacts on Palestinian women. Women and girls have been victimized by a deliberate Israeli policy of brutality and terrorization. Between 28 September 2000 and 18 August 2003, 128 Palestinian women (not including girls under 15) have been killed¹⁶ and hundreds more injured; most of them “accidental victims” of indiscriminate Israeli attacks. For example, an 18-year old woman in Hebron, Areej al-Jibali, was killed when two bullets struck her in the back while she was hanging laundry outside her house. On 1 September 2003, eight-year old Aya Fayad was shot dead as she rode her bicycle. According to her mother, Aya “was excitedly awaiting the first day of the school year. She was delighted with her new books, and for days she had insisted on carrying her new school bag and wearing the new clothes her mother had bought in preparation.”¹⁷ Another school girl, 14-year old Ghazala Jarada, was injured in the head by a rubber-coated bullet as she was returning home from school.

Some women have died as a result of not being able to reach hospitals. Others have been forced to give birth at Israeli army checkpoints. Abir Taisir Najjar, for example, went into labor on the morning of 18 March 2003 in Nablus. The ambulance in which she was travelling was stopped at an Israeli checkpoint. In Abir’s words: “My screams grew bigger. My time was due. The soldiers at the checkpoint ignored our presence and they searched the ambulance slowly despite my screams and my critical condition. What hurt me more was that a soldier opened the door of the ambulance in the rear and searched the vehicle there without any consideration or mercy.” By the time the ambulance was permitted to proceed, Abir had given birth.¹⁸

There has been a significant rise in psychological illnesses as women see their children terrorized, their homes demolished, and their towns and villages turned into war zones. Many women admit to feeling depressed and demoralized. Iman Greieb, for example, whose neighborhood in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem was shelled for over five hours by the Israelis, while she and her four children cowered in terror in their home, commented: “The shelling of my home where I was with my children has affected me deeply; it has taken part of my heart. I no more feel capable of happiness, whatever may happen to me and my family.”¹⁹

There are also reports of an increase in domestic violence against women. This has resulted from the lack of an independent judiciary and police force as well as men’s perception of their own powerlessness, which seeks a release in aggression against weaker members of the family. A survey carried out in the West Bank revealed that

between 44 and 52 per cent of the women interviewed said they had been exposed to psychological violence; and 21 – 23 per cent admitted experiencing physical violence.²⁰ Unfortunately, “when a woman is physically abused by her husband and asks for support and protection from her relatives, her relatives often force her to return to her husband under the pretext of the children’s welfare.”²¹

However, attitudes may be changing. Another public opinion poll on the issue of violence against women revealed that 49.3 per cent of respondents believe Palestinian customs and traditions constitute a stumbling block to the progress of women; and 37.9 per cent said that the Palestinian Authority had not established a sufficient number of institutions to combat violence against women. According to one of the poll’s organizers, “such a survey aimed at disclosing and unveiling the repercussions of a sensitive issue like violence against women, and also to shed light on its being a reflection of the prevailing male culture in our Palestinian society. This culture is exploited by the men to impose their control and domination on women.”²²

In addition, Palestinian women are subjected to violence by the international community and international media, in the forms, first, of failure by international bodies and individual states to protect Palestinian civilians from the aggressive policies of the Israeli occupation and second, of myth-making that portrays Palestinian nationalism as terrorism. To the dismay of families who do everything they can to protect their children, Palestinian women have been portrayed as “unnatural mothers.” The “official Israeli propaganda and much of the Israeli media have promoted the idea of Palestinian mothers pushing their children to be killed on the frontlines of the clashes. This adds further pain and suffering to Palestinian women. They are dispossessed of their humanity, while their morality and love for their children is questioned.”²³

Despite the extreme gravity of the situation faced by the Palestinian population, and even though they have been disproportionately victimized by acts of violence, Palestinian women have had relatively little involvement in the waging of violence through a combination of historical patterns, traditional practices, the particular circumstances of the conflict, and local constructions of masculinity and femininity. However, it was reported in March 2002 that a special unit for female suicide bombers had been set up in the West Bank. According to a leader of al-Aqsa Brigades: “We have 200 young women from the Bethlehem area alone ready to sacrifice themselves for the homeland.”²⁴

The emergence of the female suicide bomber must be regarded as a significant deviation from the conventions

of Palestinian society. In a community that values appropriate gender roles, the woman who is prepared to sacrifice herself, even for the sacred national struggle, is likely to be regarded as abnormal. The suggestion that large numbers of young Palestinian women are now prepared to die violently for the cause indicates either that the desperation of the Palestinian plight has unbalanced normal gender hierarchies or that the position of women in Palestinian society is undergoing radical change.

Some commentators argue that the polarization of Palestinian society and, in particular, the growing centrality of militant Islamic groups, constitutes a setback for women. The element of insecurity in Palestinian society, caused by intensified Israeli repression, has led to the reduction of freedom and choice for many women. Families, anxious about their daughters’ safety – for example, at university or in the work place – often prefer to keep the girls at home or marry them off early. As a result of the Israeli re-occupation of most of the West Bank in 2002, women’s organizations have found it difficult to maintain their activities.

Conclusion

As this brief survey illustrates, Palestinian women have been active throughout the national liberation struggle. With an increase in educational opportunities for girls, together with changing attitudes, women have been able not just to contribute towards the waging of the struggle but also to create a space in which they can push for enhanced women’s rights. It is clear that they have been empowered by their participation in the resistance movement. Women are fighting back, not just against the Israeli occupation but also against some of the negative traditions of their own society. They have shown on countless occasions their courage and steadfastness in the face of unimaginable suffering. They have lost their children, suffered miscarriages, and seen their homes destroyed and their husbands imprisoned.

What measures are available to protect women from the violence of armed conflict? One way would be to alter radically the way we try to resolve conflicts. UN Resolution 1325 (2001), the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women’s contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace, reaffirms “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building” and stresses “the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”²⁵ A proposal has been put forward for an “international women’s commission,” which would be “formally attached as an advisory panel to any Middle East peace negotiations...

The commission, made up of Palestinian, Israeli and international women peacemakers, would have a specific mandate to review all documents in the light of how they would impact on women, children and normal, non-military society.²⁶

A second way to protect women is through the strengthening of civil society. As Mary Kaldor argues, "war and the threat of war always represented a limitation on democracy... Global civil society... is about 'civilizing' or democratizing globalization, about the process through which groups, movements and individuals can demand a global rule of law, global justice and global empowerment."²⁷ Global civil society is offered as an alternative to

war. For women, who tend to be associated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-violent and constructive alternatives to war, the notion of the increased globalization of civil society provides the possibility that Palestinian women, in the future, will be able to play a more respected role in their society.

Finally, the resilience and extraordinary strength shown by Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are positive indicators that the latest round of Israeli state violence against them, their families and their homes will not succeed in breaking either their spirits or their determination to resist until a just solution is finally achieved.

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19. Reported by Randa Siniara of Al-Haq, in a presentation to the Sanabel Committee in support of Palestinian women and children, 29 April 2003.
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21. Mohammad al-Haj Yahya, "Violence against women leads to oppression," *Sparks*, April 1992, p.5.
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Thorny Issues and Perilous Coalitions: Addressing Women's Human Rights in the context of Conflict and the Struggle to Restore Democracy in Sudan (1989-2000)

■ By Nada Mustafa M. Ali

Academic and activist currently working with the London-based African Health for Empowerment and Development

Introduction¹

When people [at the National Democratic Alliance conference in Asmara in 1995] started talking about democratic laws, the issue of women was raised. Of course [a member of a sectarian party] jumped up and said "so women's [issues] have come here as well? Just like that from the start? So what do women have to do with that issue? Why do you want to mess up the story?" A party representative actually said that! (Interview with a former member of the NDA Executive Office and delegate to the Asmara 1995 Conference).

In 1989, the National Islamic Front (NIF), a political Islamist group that developed out of the Sudanese Muslim Brothers' movement, overthrew an elected government in Sudan through a military backed coup. This not only forced active political groups into underground and exile politics, but also initiated a process of rethinking a number of issues that had contributed to the instability of the country since it attained political independence in 1956. The main issues were the question of the relationship between religion and politics, the right to self-determination for historically disadvantaged people in Southern Sudan, and the restructuring

of wealth and power so as to terminate injustices based on religion, culture, region, and socio-economic background.

This re-thinking was manifested in the resolutions of the first conference of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella organization of Sudanese opposition parties, trade unions, and the 'Legitimate Command of the armed forces', which was formed in Khartoum in 1989. Held in Asmara, Eritrea, in 1995, the Conference of Fundamental Issues affirmed the secular nature of the state, the need to restructure economic and political institutions, and the right of the Southern region to self-determination. As such, its resolutions held the promise of ultimately ending the war that had haunted the country since 1955, with a short break between 1972 and 1983.

The violent roots of the conflict were laid down during the Anglo-Egyptian colonial era, when, through policies of divide and rule, Northern and Southern parts of the country were subject to different policies that resulted in the formation of distorted structures arising from unequal economic and political relations. Successive post-colonial governments played key roles in exacerbat-

ing regional, cultural, economic, and political injustices by focusing development schemes in the North and imposing on this multi-racial and multi-cultural country a single cultural identity and religion.

Given the neopatriarchal nature of the post-colonial state and society, characterized by the marginalization of women; the mainstream women's movement, which can be traced back to the 1950s, played an important role in introducing some legal reforms and influencing the political atmosphere in the 1960s.

The war intensified after the coup of 1989, which halted the peace process that had been initiated during the democratic period. The government announced the termination of the war in the South as one of its main aims, but pursued policies that exacerbated the war because of its attempt to implement its religious 'civilizational project' and its portrayal of the war in the South as a Jihad (holy war) against non-Muslims. Armed opposition also erupted in Western and Eastern Sudan as well as the Southern Blue Nile, changing the nature of the conflict in the 1990s and problematizing the binary nature of "what had been [in] the 1980s a war between the North and the South, Muslims against Christians and 'Arab' against 'African'" (Johnson, 2003: iiix).

Most of the discourse on the conflict in Sudan has been gender blind, with very few exceptions (cf. Jok, 1997, Abdelhalim, 1998). However, women in Southern Sudan have been affected by the war in a gender-specific way. In addition to heavy bombardment of villages and the subsequent displacement of about four million Sudanese, the majority of whom are women and children, Southern Sudanese women have been subject to rape, abduction, enslavement, and -- together with women in the Nuba Mountains -- use by the government as tools of ethnic cleansing. Soldiers from the North were encouraged and rewarded

for marrying women from these areas in order to produce Muslim children and were rewarded for this. Women in predominantly Muslim areas in Eastern Sudan and the Blue Nile area have also been subjected to various human rights abuses by the government.

In light of the above, the Asmara 1995 conference constituted a turning point in Sudanese politics. Although its

resolutions endorsed international human rights conventions, they curtailed women's human rights on the basis of religion. This was manifested in Article Five, which contained the only reference to women in the Asmara resolutions:

The NDA undertakes to preserve and promote the dignity of the Sudanese woman, and affirms her role in the Sudanese national movement and her rights and duties as enshrined in international instruments and covenants without prejudice to the tenets of prevailing religious and noble spiritual beliefs (Final Communiqué of the Conference of Fundamental Issues, Asmara, June 1995, 1.B.5, emphasis mine).

Since 1995, this clause, together with the issue of women's representation in the exclusively male NDA Leadership Council and Executive Office, dominated public discourse, mainly through activist women and women's groups' resistance to this marginalization.

Taking the issue of commitment to women's human rights as a point of reference I address the discourse of various on women's human rights by exiled opposition parties, organized under the umbrella of the NDA and produced in a situation of armed conflict and struggle towards restoring democracy. I explore lessons that could be learned by Sudanese women's groups given the fact that, since July 2002, the peace process in Sudan has taken a new turn, making the conclusion of a peace agreement in 2004 a possibility.

Competing Discourses on 'Article Five' and CEDAW
Alfaqr Khamsa (Article Five) of the Asmara declaration mainly emphasized acknowledgement rather than commitment to women's interests, using the language of dignity rather than that of citizenship, interests, and human rights. Needless to say the word dignity is open to many interpretations, including interpretations that could encourage domesticity and discrimination against women in order to preserve their 'dignity'. By limiting the commitment to women's rights on a religious basis, Article Five not only disabled key articles in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but also contradicted the NDA Charter, which emphasized "full equality of citizens ..., respect for religious beliefs and traditions and without discrimination on grounds of religion, race, gender or culture" [article (2.i.a), emphasis mine].

Various states and parties in Africa and the Middle East share this contradiction between general constitutional arrangements on the one hand and the commitment to women's equal rights on the other hand. Whether in sec-

ular (liberal, nationalist, and socialist) or religious theocratic regimes, with the exception of the former Northern Yemen, personal status laws are often derived from Islamic Shari'a, Christian law, or local customs. In a Muslim context, these derive from Shari'a and regulate issues of "marriage, divorce, maintenance, child custody and inheritance" (Moghadam, 1994: 144). They generally reflect and consolidate patriarchal structures and male domination. In that way, personal status laws have often contradicted constitutional clauses that prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender. Sudan is no exception.

Given that Sudan encompasses religions other than Islam, the fact that Article Five talks about religious beliefs in general means the maintenance of the prevalent legal arrangements amongst non-Muslims as well. Many of the Southern and Nuba women I interviewed in Nairobi pointed to oppressive customs, and the same was maintained in magazine articles issued by some of the organizations active in Nairobi.

It is often argued that what differentiates secular and Islamist activist women in Muslim countries is that the former draw on CEDAW as their reference for establishing personal status laws. Islamists, on the other hand, draw on Sharia'a laws and the various interpretations of religion as a reference. Although in the case of Sudanese opposition politics it was the secular groups that supported women's demands by reference to CEDAW, some reformist Islamic currents claim that CEDAW does not contradict 'real' Islam. Before the current debate on Article Five, however, women's groups "challenged discriminatory laws by relying strictly on those mechanisms available within the domestic law" (Abdel Halim, 1994: 397; Hale, 1996).

The discourses that evolved around Article Five fall into the center of this debate on CEDAW. This article generated wide criticism from women's groups and activists in Egypt, Europe, and North America. The analysis and protests against Article Five have not identified the heterogeneity and contradictions of NDA discourse and institutional practices on women. As such, this criticism tended to look at the NDA discourses and practices as exclusively detrimental to women. To the contrary, my investigation revealed considerable heterogeneity and fragmentation of that discourse.

As is the case with any alliance, the parties comprising the NDA were founded at different historical eras and have different strategies and interests which are bound to influence their stands on women's issues. The Umma party (which defected from the NDA in 2000) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) were founded as the

country was about to negotiate political independence, reflecting the interests of agricultural capital and trade, respectively. Both parties relied on sectarian-religious patriarchal sentiments in maintaining their wide base of supporters in rural areas of the Sudan and continuously won elections in the democratic eras. Maintaining the prevalent neopatriarchal system corresponds well with maintaining the authority of these groups.

The Communist Party of the Sudan (CPS) was established in the 1940s and has since been supported by the educated middle class in towns, laborers in agricultural schemes, and railway and port workers. Although the party promoted women's rights to political participation since the 1950s, it adopted a reformist stand towards patriarchal gender norms prevalent in Northern and Central Sudan so as not to 'offend the masses' (Hale 1996) and kept a 'low profile' on secularism.

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was formed in the early 1980s with the aim of establishing a New Sudan that secures social justice for people who were marginalized politically, economically, and socially since independence. The movement expressed commitment to secularism, although its stand on local customs affecting women is still unclear and although customary law still prevails in SPLM/A held areas in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. The Sudan National Alliance/Alliance Forces (SNA/SAF) was formed in the mid 1990s as an alliance between urban, left of center professionals, trade unionists and former military cadres, on one the hand, and marginalized groups in the rural areas, women, and youth, on the other hand. The movement has adopted a New Sudan agenda, with an expressed secular stand. The SNA/SAF endorsed CEDAW officially since its establishment.

The Beja Congress, Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) and Sudan National Party (SNP) emerged out of regional interest groups that were formed shortly after independence in Eastern and Western Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, respectively. These parties transformed their agendas in the early 1990s, adopting New Sudan principles. Gradually, supporters of the Umma party in Darfur and Kordufan (Western Sudan) came to constitute an expanding base for the SFDA and the SNP, while the

... personal status laws ... regulate issues of marriage, divorce, maintenance, child custody and inheritance.

Most of the discourse on the conflict in Sudan has been gender blind, with very few exceptions.

Beja Congress expanded among the supporters of the DUP in Eastern Sudan. While the three groups have adopted the New Sudan agenda, including its secular component, the Beja Congress considers it risky to announce a program that subverts dominant gender norms, given the extremely conservative nature of its constituency.

While some of the groups in the NDA share strategic interests, what brought all these forces together was the desire to overthrow a common enemy, the NIF, and to end the war and restore multi-party democracy. Bringing such diverse forces together obviously involved a bargain and was considered a great achievement on local, regional, and international levels. The Asmara conference is referred to in opposition discourse as *al musawama al tarikhiyya* (the historic bargain). It is argued in this paper that women's human rights were compromised in order to achieve this bargain.

Sectarian Parties: 'The West Imagined'

In public debate and at official NDA meetings and conferences, the sectarian Umma and DUP parties objected to the NDA's endorsement of CEDAW and to any change in Article Five. Umma discourse has shifted superficially over the time. For example, former Prime Minister Sadeq Al Mahdi, who chairs the party, replied to my question on 'Article Five' in July 1997 by stating that "Islam does not discriminate against women." One year later, Al-Mahdi argued: "While Article Five, in its current form, might

contradict with the possibility of obtaining full human rights for women, it is also difficult for us to change this clause, [because] human rights conventions contain elements that contradict with our religion" (addressing the Conference on the State and Higher Education in Sudan, Cairo: August 1998). In later discussions with some of the female participants at the same conference, he stated that CEDAW encouraged "homosexuality, promiscuity, and abortion ... Things that we would not accept in our communities" (emphasis mine).

In interviews, informants from the Umma party and the DUP repeatedly mobilized similar justifications to explain their objections to changing Article Five. This involved the construction of CEDAW as a 'Western' product and the construction of the West as homogeneous and

'immoral' as well as constructions of local discourses that aimed at changing gender relations along similar lines. A DUP leader who was member of the committee that drafted the Asmara resolutions stated that

When we drafted [Article Five], we aimed at preserving women's rights! We ensured public rights by emphasizing equality, democracy, and citizenship rights. Regarding the private sphere, we in Sudan are a believing society, whether people adhered to Islam, Christianity or other local religions. For us, personal affairs are based on religion and each community should tailor its personal status laws accordingly. In Islam we have laws upon which family matters draw, and so is the case with Christianity and other beliefs...there are some with no interest in religion or even with a stand against religion, who would want to erase (Article Five) just because it has the word 'religions' in it. This view might even go further and adopt civil marriage, distancing us from religion. Marriage would become a contract, as is the case with any company or trade. This, in fact, is against all rights... It does not protect the child and family and morals and fidelity in society. Our society, customs, and traditions do not permit certain practices that currently exist in Europe and in advanced countries. We do not permit it to take place in our society.

Similarly, the Secretary for Women's affairs in the DUP stated,

... we have got some reservations on the statement that 'women should be treated according to international human rights conventions'. I believe that religion is a constant, it does not change, but conventions are drafted by human beings and as such, it is these conventions that could be changed. Thus, we are not to ask that our religion be replaced with man-made laws. What Article Five said was that each one should follow what his/her religion tells him/her. I think that this is not a bad idea. I don't think that this limits women's freedom, such as the right to work. Yes, it limits women's freedom regarding some things that I think we agree as a Muslim community that it [should be limited]. Don't forget that the Sudanese are religious. We know what is going on around us. When I now look at the position of women in the West, I thank God that I was raised up in the community where I grew up in. I can't walk naked in the street and think that this way I become equal to men. To the contrary, this degrades women (interview with Secretary for Women Affairs, DUP. London: April 19, 1999).

In his "Women of the West Imagined: The Farangi Other and the Emergence of the Woman Question in Iran," Mohamad Tavakoli-Tariki (1994) argued that the political and cultural encounter with the West in the context of colonialism resulted in shaping the dynamics of the women's question in Iran. The above objection to

CEDAW was based on the way 'women of the West' are imagined in contemporary opposition discourse. This discourse is influenced by the dependent relationship with that West in an increasingly globalized world. It homogenizes and ossifies both Sudanese and Western cultures, and speaks more about the (internal and external) boundaries that these parties aim to consolidate than it tells about CEDAW, the West, or the local advocates.

Even when I pointed to the fact that the 'three ps: i.e., prostitution, promiscuity and pornography' were not actually in CEDAW, or that CEDAW did not encourage a specific dress (or undress) code, informants pointed to the 'West', where they believe CEDAW originated:

And where do you think this convention came from? ... Here [in the UK] you can see that women are beaten. In our communities, men cannot beat women. Here the man does not have the right to divorce a woman unilaterally, but she can live with someone else [without marriage]. That is why the families are fragmented in the West. These things that they write [such as CEDAW] are just empty talk. For us, we conserve the form of our society, and we are better off than they are. This goes without saying. And things like hijab, etc., are there to protect us.

The situation is complicated for the whole opposition, but especially for the two sectarian parties, given their competition over 'legitimacy' and 'authenticity' with NIF, which consistently propagated an image of the exiled opposition as 'the five star hotels opposition.' Sudanese President Omar Elbashir inaugurated the oil-pipelines in 1999 by inviting the opposition to quit its current practices of "sipping beer" in international capitals, and advised opposition leaders to "cleanse themselves [from sin] in the Red Sea" before returning home. In a society that is becoming increasingly conservative, these charges often deter any tampering with issues that have to do with what is constructed as 'morality.' It is women's rights that are most affected by such contests.

It was interesting to note that the various justifications were not grounded in a direct reading of CEDAW. Informants from Umma and DUP admitted that they had never read the document. Yet their idea of CEDAW's content and their justifications for refusing to endorse it were astonishingly uniform. Asked about the source of their information on CEDAW, several stated that they "followed what was written about mu'tamar bikin [the 1995 UN Beijing Conference] and the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the [Egyptian] press." As the above narratives reflect, the prevalent discourse in the Egyptian media, especially the Islamist press, on these conferences was hostile (N.Ali, 1999; Guenena and Wassef, 1999; Abdelsalam, 1995).

The Islamist media generally argued that the Beijing and ICPD documents were against Islam and that they aimed to consolidate Western hegemony and encouraged 'promiscuity' (Abdelsalam, 1995: 9). As such, these two parties' discourse used constructions of 'Western decadence' produced by the Egyptian media in order to maintain control over women and hence over the social order.

'Progressive' Groups: the Historic Bargain

Parties advocating structural change revealed positions that were critical of Article Five, ranging from integrating such a critique into the political agenda of the movement (the SNA/SAF) to supporting "demands of women's groups who support the NDA" (the CPS and the SPLM/A). The Beja and the SFDA were silent on the issue in public debates, but informants from the leadership of these parties acknowledged the importance of a commitment to women's human rights.

A former executive member in the Cairo office of SNA/SAF responded to my question on the universality versus cultural specificity of women's human rights as follows:

For us in the SNA/SAF, these conventions emphasize freedom and emancipation and they lay the basis for the practice of this freedom. That is why we had no illusion with regard to the change of Article Five. We endorse CEDAW and there is no religious, cultural nor historical contradiction that makes me support an article that does not give women their full rights (interview, Cairo: July 11, 1998).

An SPLM/A leader simply stated that "a woman is a human being, and all human beings should be treated equally. Even religious constraints and traditions that differentiate between women and men should not prevail". (interview, Cairo: April 7, 1998).

The discourse of a CPS leader reveals the dilemma between 'starting from where the masses stand' on one hand, and the need to escape 'worn out traditions,' on the other hand:

We in the CPS believe that we should start from where the masses stand, and eventually raise the consciousness of these masses. At the same time, we would not easily

For us, personal affairs are based on religion and each community should tailor its personal status laws accordingly.

I can't walk naked in the street and think that this way I become equal to men.

surrender to the power of outdated traditions or that of the sectarian forces, but we are not anarchists or arrogant in our relationship to the masses. We support women's social, economic and political rights without reservation but not in a coarse form. We support the demands that women themselves raised regarding their representation in the NDA, and have no reservation to changing Article Five (Interview with Head of CPS office in Cairo: May 6, 1998).

If the stand of the progressive groups was against curtailing women's rights on religious basis, then why was curtailment adopted unanimously by the NDA in June 1995? The main explanation is that women's human rights were compromised in the bargain between these groups and the sectarian parties over more 'fundamental issues': the relationship between religion and politics, the right to self-determination for Southern Sudan, and unity of the opposition.

For some of the informants, particularly those representing predominantly non-Muslim constituencies, the issue of Article Five was seen as solely relevant to Northern/Muslim Sudanese. A former representative of the Union of Sudan African Parties in the NDA Executive Office, for example, stated that:

There are people who have been raising the rights flag in the face of those who think that human rights should be universally applied without any special provisions. Some people try to attribute their objections to what they describe as religious dictates. As a non-Muslim, I think it would be considered rude on my part to really try to challenge the stand of those people (interview, Cairo, May 18, 1998, emphasis mine).

Generally speaking, it is often considered among predominantly Southern groups (with the exception of SPLM/A official discourse) that clauses like Article Five affect women in the North more. The argument behind that position is that the major parties and communities in the North are predominantly Islamic. As I argue elsewhere (Ali, 1999), the potentially favorable situation of women in the South and the Nuba

Mountains is often invoked as a boundary marker between these and the hegemonic Arabo-Islamist groups that dominated the 'Old' Sudan. The above narrative makes clear, however, that women's human rights

were also compromised in relation to the cultural and religious rights of male sectarian leaders. Gender was thus an integral part of the historic bargain. This was confirmed by the attitude of the Umma party, while still a member of the NDA, when it threatened to revisit the entire NDA Charter and Asmara resolutions, including its secular components, whenever the issue of changing Article Five was raised in meetings. Similarly, at the second NDA Conference (Massawa, Eritrea, 2000), after female activists exerted a huge effort to change Article Five, the discussion was silenced when the leader of the DUP, who chairs the NDA, threatened to revisit 'Self-determination for the South' if Article Five was discussed.

On War and Human Rights

Activists from various New Sudan parties, who focused on problems facing people in war affected areas, emphasized the importance of acknowledging the specificity of the issues facing women in these areas, while generally emphasizing the universality of rights. A recurrent answer to my question on what New Sudan party leaders understood as women's liberation has been that, at present, women's (and men's) lives are at stake given the conflict situation and that, as such, women's priorities are not necessarily linked to achieving their rights inscribed in international conventions.

During Article 5 related NDA debates, representatives of the Beja Congress and the predominantly Nuba Sudan National Party, invited 'sisters in the women's movement in the cities to remember the problems faced by their sisters in the liberated areas, as a result of poverty and war.' Answering a question on Article 5, the Secretary General of the Beja Congress stated that,

For us as Beja, the issue of women is thorny, that is why we are always cautious to address it with a great deal of sensitivity. Not that this big talking about women's rights and feminism is not a concern for us, but that in our areas there are real problems facing us right now: There are women who are married off at an early age, and they die at an early age. These are real problems rather than theoretical talk on the rights of women in the NDA or in a state that might and might not be achieved. We are concerned with the existence of women in the area: her life and death. Not their culture or identity but their existence... We always lean towards practicality: I bring copy-books, pencils, and a blackboard, I make a conducive atmosphere for women so that they can understand, and then [the woman] can decide for herself whether or not to 'contradict with religions'. My responsibility is to put her on track (interview with Al-Amin Shingirai, Secretary General of the Beja Congress, Cairo, June 6, 1998, italics in bold mine).

Similarly, New Sudan leaders operating in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, including women activists, have pointed to the atrocities to which women in these areas have been subjected, concluding that overcoming these is a more urgent priority compared to a commitment to CEDAW. One of the SPLM/A leaders in the Nuba Mountains argued that:

In the Nuba Mountains, the government army kidnaps women, men and children. Women and children are then kept in the so called 'peace villages'. Young women are then used for the nights. Each soldier takes the girl that he fancies and 'goes away with her.' Elderly women are sent to fetch water and fire wood. These are daily violations, and you know that in our cultures in Sudan if a young girl loses her honor then she thinks that her future is ruined. These are the kinds of problems that women in the Nuba Mountains emphasize (interview with Walid Hamid, Director of the office of the SPLM/A's Commissioner of Southern Kordofan; SPLM/A, Nairobi, March 24, 1999).

That Nuba leader referred to the specific problems affecting women living in the war zones. He argued that if women in the war zones were asked to list their priorities, the achievement of gender equality would come at the end of a ten-point list. Nonetheless, he specified areas of activism that dealt with gender-specific violations of women's human rights. One of the problems with New Sudan groups' emphasis on 'practical needs' is that this discourse can easily be appropriated by the sectarian parties and by forces within the New Sudan that are resistant to gender transformation (e.g. tribal chiefs in the liberated areas).

As such, it is important to highlight sections of CEDAW that address women and conflict, education, health, etc., and to point out that CEDAW is not only about personal status laws, without compromising parts that address personal status laws. In that context, it would also be important to invoke other relevant international conventions or resolutions. An example is Resolution 1325 on women and conflict situations, passed by the UN Security Council in October 2000. A number of Sudanese women's groups (e.g. SWA and the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace) took part in the campaign to introduce this resolution.

Conclusion

This analysis addressed the way various political groups, united under the umbrella of the NDA, related to issues of women's human rights in the context of armed conflict and the struggle to restore democracy in Sudan since 1989. Forces aiming to induce transformation have favored a commitment to women's human rights, while

groups aiming mainly to overthrow the current regime in Sudan have limited their support of women's human rights on a religious basis.

Collectively, however, parties in the NDA took a stand that contradicted the full realization of women's rights, subordinating women's human rights to wider questions of democratic reform, secularism, and the maintenance of the unity of the opposition. Thus the 'historic bargain' between the progressive forces and the sectarian parties involved a compromise of women's interests. This is not to suggest that progressive movements in Sudan are (or should be) necessarily committed to preserving women's human rights. As "in many progressive nationalist and socialist projects, women's issues are at best paid lip service, at worst greeted with hilarity...[seldom] has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant of nationalism" (McCinnon, 1997:386).

There are a number of potential areas for women's activism in order to induce a commitment to CEDAW and to engender post-conflict reconstruction in Sudan. The NDA's focus on the current regime's abuses of human rights constitutes an opportunity for women's groups to further press for change by challenging the NDA's selective approach towards international human rights documents. The NDA's former official spokesperson stated in one of the NDA Leadership Council's meetings (March 1998, attended by the author) that "this article has become an embarrassment for us in our meetings with UN and international human rights groups." This further highlights the importance of building cross-national alliances between Sudanese women's groups and women's groups and human rights organizations with relevant agendas in other countries to help place gender-specific violations on the regional and international political agendas. Sudanese women's groups can co-ordinate, for example, with Egyptian women's groups who have been vocal in resisting Islamist constructions of CEDAW and women's human rights (cf. Guenena and Wassef, 1999; Al-Ali, 1998), given that the same constructions informed views on CEDAW in part of the NDA discourse.

Finally, in the context of conflict, sometimes 'challenges on the ground' and different priorities of women at the

Each soldier takes the girl that he fancies and 'goes away with her.'

grassroots level are invoked. While these are legitimate concerns, these priorities can be used to delegitimize rather than complement the more subversive agendas that women's groups might adopt. This can include agendas of women's groups working in war affected areas. Instead, the agendas of these groups should be perceived as unfinished (Hill-Collins, 1997), to be complemented by the priorities of women who belong to marginalized social groups in the Sudan, given that

women's groups that are based in Nairobi, for example, are already addressing these issues. This emphasis, however, can be useful in widening the agendas of women's groups in urban centers and in exile, and are directly linked to tools such as CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women and conflict. This is particularly relevant as the country is embarking on a peace-building process and a process of post-conflict reconstruction.



End Notes

This paper is based on research carried out as part of a PhD project. It is based on research conducted in 1998-1999 in Egypt, Kenya, Eritrea and the UK amongst mainstream Sudanese exiled opposition groups. Research methods used included participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured, formal interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews cited in this paper were conducted with both male and female activists from all parts of Sudan, who, with a few exceptions, had access to education until at least secondary school level. Fieldwork was made possible by a ME Award from the regional office of the Population Council, Middle East and North Africa. I would like to thank all the informants for sharing their experiences and views. Thanks are also due to my Supervisor Paul Cammack.

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Women Fighting Against War Amnesia: The Case of the 'Disappeared'

■ Lynn Maalouf

Freelance reporter

In July 2003, as the Lebanese ministers met for their weekly session to discuss taxes, electricity, and cellular phone companies, two women were standing alone in the scorching heat, at the steps of the cabinet headquarters, desperately trying to get a word with anyone inside. But no one would let them in. The only response they got to their screams and shouts was to be dragged away by the security forces, before any of the ministers even knew they were there. They had walked from around the corner, from where a group of families were holding one of their weekly sit-ins before the National Museum, in one of their many efforts to keep their cause alive - that of the missing - their sons, husbands, and brothers.

The lives of these families have been besieged for the past fifteen or even thirty years, never knowing whether they can mourn their beloved ones or still have a chance of seeing them one day. Many have sacrificed their physical and mental health, their money, and their years, in the hope of knowing. Their cause is all the more difficult in that Lebanon is vainly striving to obliterate the war from its history. "The missing are the war memory that we just can't wipe out," says Adnan Houballah, psychiatrist.

There are 17,000 people officially unaccounted for in Lebanon, who were abducted or killed during the war at the hands of militias or of the armies of Lebanon, Syria and Israel. Since the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000, the majority of prisoners detained in the Khiam prison were released and on January 29, 2004, 23 Lebanese citizens known to be in Israeli jails were released as part of a prisoner swap between Hezbollah and Israel. Syria is the other place where an estimated 200 are known to be still alive, either through the families that managed to obtain a permit for a visit or through former detainees' testimonials, or even from the Lebanese or Syrian authorities that confirmed to the families the detention of their loved ones. Habib Nassar, legal advisor of the Committee of Families of Kidnapped or Disappeared in Lebanon, blames the amnesty law that was enacted in 1991 for the

We're constantly in a state of suffering. We can never be genuinely happy. When we laugh, we laugh but without any happiness ...

situation today, because it not only pardoned all those who took part in the war but also relieved them from the obligation of testifying and sharing all the information they have, including concerning the fate of the missing. The law thus ignored the victims and their families and relieved the state of any responsibility towards the families of victims, who, Nassar explains, are "confronting, daily, the silence of public authorities, the society's amnesia and the indifference of war criminals."

For years, wives, mothers, and sisters have been talking relentlessly to officials, local NGOs, and international human rights' organizations, organizing press conferences, attending conferences, and holding demonstrations. To them, there is no question of thinking that their beloved ones are deceased, even thirty years later, before they actually see the bodies.

Houballah explains that a mourning process can only be triggered when the body is seen. "The only proof of death is the body. The last look at the loved one's body is what triggers the mourning process. Without it, the process can't be triggered, and becomes endless."

Wadad Halwani 'lost' her husband Adnan on September 24, 1982. Sitting in a café in the flashy newly renovated downtown Beirut, Wadad starts losing her composure as she recounts what happened more than twenty years ago.

Her sparkling green eyes lose their piercing focus, and her fingers fiddling with her straw make their way to the pack of cigarettes. Adnan was abducted from his home, in front of his wife and two sons. He wanted to be reassuring, and said that he'd be back in five minutes. Wadad tried to remain calm. She didn't want to show her panic to her children. The five minutes dragged into years. Adnan never returned. And she regrets having stayed calm. "Maybe if I had

screamed, yelled, made a fit, the neighbors would have come out, the men taking him would have let him go."

She found herself forced to deal with a new situation, not only with the fact that she was suddenly alone, but also that she had to manage the situation vis-à-vis her parents-in-law and become a single parent, with no explanation to give to her children about the sudden 'disappearance' of their father. She hid the truth from her father-in-law for ten days, for fear of causing him a heart attack. When she did tell him,

The only proof of death is the body. The last look at the loved one's body is what triggers the mourning process.

she gradually found herself in a position of the family's 'delegate,' in charge of activating the search of her husband.

Since that day, Wadad has been obstinately active. She was one of the founders of the Committee of Families of Kidnapped or Disappeared in Lebanon, formed only two months after Adnan's disappearance. Since then, she explains that her search for her husband merged with looking for all the other husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. "I felt I was struggling for everyone." This explains why today, even though she has lost hope of seeing her husband alive, she remains as active as in the past. This forced drive into being an activist had deep repercussions on her personal life. "Your personal life just disappears. Years later, my father-in-law used to make jokes about me starting a new life with another man." However, to the society, Wadad is not a widow, and so even though she has her private life, she has never made it official. "I haven't been a saint, but I'm not holding up banners either when I'm having an affair," she says with a grin.

Sonia Eid is a mother whose son 'disappeared' in 1990. Disappeared is not really the right word, because he was proven to be in a Syrian jail, but then he went missing again. But because Syria is involved in this case, Sonia also has to struggle against the taboo that touches upon anything related to Syria. In fact, since 1990, the Syrian authorities have officially announced that they do not hold any Lebanese who were abducted from Lebanon. As for the Lebanese authorities, they did form a commission of inquiry in 2000, under pressure mainly from the Committee of Families of Kidnapped or Disappeared. Besides the total lack of credibility this commission had, given the profile of its members, it supposedly examined over 2,000 files in a mere six months, to end up issuing a three-page report saying that all the missing people were dead. Nonetheless, a few months later, the Syrian authorities released 54 detainees. Under continuous pressure, a second commission was formed in January 2001, but to this day it has failed to even issue a report.

Sonia still keeps the piece of cloth that remained from the sleeve of Jihad's military uniform the day he disappeared. He was a 20-year-old student then, and like all the kids in the neighborhood, he joined the army, which was then headed by General Michel Aoun. At 6:30 am on October 13, 1990, Jihad's friends came to get him. His father wouldn't let him out of the house. "He had a bad feeling. He had never stopped him before. That day, he was clutching onto his son, trying to hold him back from getting out the door. But Jihad left, and all that was left of him was a piece of his sleeve, which stayed in his father's hand." When he didn't return that afternoon, his parents went to look for him. They found out that he had been taken to Hotel Beau Rivage, which was controlled by the Syrian

army. Eyewitnesses said he had been shot in the leg and the shoulder. Today, he is known as the "A'raj", or the limping, after his leg was amputated. For six years, Sonia worked silently to obtain the release of her son.

She saw him once in the thirteen years. She only had the right to see him from afar. He was the seventh in a line of prisoners, all blindfolded, with their hands tied behind their backs, "like a herd of sheep", she said. She wasn't allowed to talk to him. He probably didn't even know she was there.

"It is worth noting that since there is no official mechanism in Lebanon to help the families learn of the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones or to seek legal remedy, they live in pain and fear. The fear stems from the fact that the Lebanese government not only denies the problem but also intimidates the families and is putting sustained efforts to close the file," writes SOLIDE, (Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile), a human rights group formed in 1989, focused on the cases of Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons.

Fatmeh Abdullah lives as a refugee in Beirut. Sitting in a large hall, with the bare minimum furniture, one large blown up picture hangs on the wall. It's her brother Ali, who was seized by Syrian forces in July 1981 at the Cola roundabout in Beirut. He was a cab driver, around 20 years old, one year younger than Fatmeh. "In 1995, a former detainee came to me and told me he was with Ali in the same prison, in Palmyra. When he wanted to testify to the Lebanese authorities, one high official told him: Don't open closed doors."

To Fatmeh, the most difficult part of the situation is the unknown. Although she's already had more than one source certify that her brother is still alive, the information is only sporadic, and doesn't describe Ali's latest situation. "We're constantly in a state of suffering. We can never be genuinely happy. When we laugh, we laugh but without any happiness," she says, as her eyes well up.

Finances are another major problem for these families. Most often, the persons abducted were the heads of families or contributed to the family's budget. So not only were these families deprived of a source of income, but they've also had to pay bribes over the years in order to visit their loved ones or to try to negotiate their release. Ghazi Aad, founder of SOLIDE, gives the example of a mother who has had to pay as much as \$26,000 over the past thirteen years. He explains that there is a whole Lebanese-Syrian network of people who exploit the situation of these families, claiming to act as brokers. They can include the local mukhtars (notables), government officials, and others. "They go to the family and promise to help, and take

bribes through blackmail and extortion. But there are no guarantees".

Since 1994, when George was abducted, the Chalawet family has been enduring particularly strenuous economic – apart from psychological – problems. George was the eldest son and worked as a jeweler. George's father, Ayoub, describes the abduction of his son, to which he was a witness, as follows: "On March 30, 1994, individuals in civilian clothes came looking for my son at our home in Beirut, pretending they had golden jewelry in need of repair. George was not home. They asked that George present himself at the Ministry of Health. Our son returned home at 3 pm. We went to the Ministry of Health, and when we arrived there, some men came down from the fifth floor. They made me wait outside and took George away, in the direction of West Beirut. They later came back without George and told me they are keeping him for interrogation. George never came back. It took us six months to find his whereabouts: He had been detained in Damascus in the jail called Palestine Section. Later, we were allowed to visit him every three months at the Mazze Prison. But [since 1998] no visits are allowed" (FIDH/SOLIDA report, January 2001).

In the past nine years, the Chalawet family has had to move into a smaller house and barely has enough resources to survive. Both sisters have had nervous breakdowns since their brother's abduction, and one of them is being hospitalized for the fourth time. Thérèse, the second sister, says: "For the past four years, I've been on medication, and I haven't been able to work." The two sons work as private drivers and have to pay for the family's expenses and the medical treatment. Nadia Chalawet, who last visited her son six years and eight months ago, sums up her situation: "They took my son, our money, our health, and they haven't returned my son".

All the women - the mothers, sisters and wives of missing - seem to share several points in common: They have no fear of the authorities, they are not the least impressed by all the official efforts to scrap the file, and they have an unflinching will to keep struggling to the end, until they know the fate of their beloved ones. Maybe only then will Lebanon reopen the painful Pandora box of the war, before it closes it once and for all, after the amnesia has turned into memory.

I haven't been a saint, but I'm not holding up banners either when I'm having an affair,

Four Women Relate their Experiences in Combat during the War...

Purposes Vary but the Fixation on Gender Equality Remains!

■ Darine Al-Omari

Journalist

The war is still a part of each and every one of us. Many endured its brutality, be it due to instability, death, displacement, destruction or the hardship of ensuring daily bread. Many remember it with a shy feeling of nostalgia sometimes, including us, the youth, who were fledglings at the time: how fun were the nights in the shelter when neighbors gathered together; how nice it was not to go to school and instead spend the whole day playing.

It was beautiful in its ugliness; the explosion of this or that shell and what it would do to us. Our hearts would sink with the noise only to climb back up again ready to welcome the next sound. In spite of the ugliness, there was something beautiful about this moment, a feeling no person can experience in a time of peace. Each moment of our life consisted of the eeriest contradictions; life and death, beauty and ugliness; fear and excitement. We would play a game of cat and mouse, a game of life and death with each shell. We would stick our heads out to see its direction and fire, then we would hide those heads in fear of its targeting our innocent courage.

The war, then, broke the routine of our lives, giving us a kiss of life and death each moment. Beirut, at the time, was not a tedious city either; a city beautiful in the

destruction caused by war which was a museum for a widowed woman. But now... This city has turned into Beirut, a modern, new and imaginary memory ... Beirut, the unoriginal. The war made us live a collective memory. How painful this memory was, but it did give us a national identity and a sense of belonging to this country beautiful in its widowhood. We loved Beirut then...

Beirut was not the only female who took part in the war. It was a fertile space for several women who participated in the war for various reasons. This article sheds light on the experience of four women: Fadia Bazzi, Kifah Afifi, Jocelyn Khoeiry, and Suad. It highlights how they rebelled against their traditional roles and chose one of their own, despite society's rejection. Each woman had a different motive to take part in the civil war, the war against Israel, the camps war, or the war against Palestinians.

For Fadia, a member of the Communist Party, the motives to participate in the civil war included her growing up in a house which was akin to a military post on the demarcation lines separating her party and one of the opposing movements, her enthusiasm to participate in the war at age sixteen, her commitment to defending the entity of

the Communist Party "which was threatened by other parties and organizations," the absence of a government as protector of the Lebanese. "Had I not fought them, they could have reached my house, killing my family and me," says Fadia.

Suad, a Marxist combatant, was against civil war because she refused to belong to any confession, although she did participate in the resistance against Israel. "Mine is the motive of every patriotic human being," she says. Suad has been living in fear from Israel since she was seven. The first image imprinted on her mind was that of Israel, murderer of children. "That was long before I knew what Israel was, what its purposes were, and what it took from the Arab countries," she explains. Suad adds, "My parents forbade me from playing with any toy in fear of its being booby-trapped by Israel."

Kifah, a Palestinian from the Shatila camp, grew up during the civil war and witnessed the bombing of the camp, which gave her two motives to participate in the civil war and the war against Israel. The first was to fight the internal enemy and the second was to fight the external enemy. "I felt there was not one enemy called Israel," she comments. "There were several enemies who hated Palestinians and who had a hand in the Sabra and Shatila massacre like the Lebanese Forces, the Phalanges, and Saad Haddad's group."

Jocelyn, a member of the Lebanese Phalange, thinks that the civil war was a result of the Lebanese – Palestinian war. "Otherwise, I would not have borne arms and enlisted in the war." In her opinion, her motives were not con-

Picture Credit: Darine Al-Omari



fessional but purely Lebanese, focused on Lebanon's sovereignty and the security of its people. "The war was not against the Palestinian cause, it was against Palestinians creating a Lebanese cause because of theirs and having a state of their own within ours," she argues. "We took them in and offered them job opportunities. In return, armed Palestinians threatened the simplest bases of our dignity."

Jocelyn had another motive to participate fervently in the war and that was to prove that there was no difference between men and women. In addition, her house was located in the Saifi area, where she experienced the events first hand. "I was automatically transported into the scene, particularly after all my female and male colleagues had become involved in the war," she recalls.

Parents' and Society's Stand

Most parents did not accept the participation of their daughters in the war. Society was not more receptive. On the contrary, it was entirely negative, which made these women face some criticism and rumors. Fadia's parents did not reject the idea because her entire family participated in the war. "My father, my brothers, and I would fight and my mom would prepare the food for us as well as other fighters," she says. Fadia learned how to use a gun at age eight when her father told her: "You must defend yourself and your siblings, if I were to die." The only opposition Fadia faced was from the principal of her school who would yell at her, saying: "You should bear your books instead of arms." Fadia continues: "I would defend myself telling her, 'When you're standing on the demarcation lines and your life is in danger, you will be forced to bear arms to defend yourself.'"

At first, Suad's parents did not accept her participation in the war. "My parents accepted my membership in the Party," she notes. "But they did not accept my decision to bear arms and fight against Israel." Her parents resorted to every possible means to dissuade her. Her mother hid her military kit and her father came back from a trip to talk her out of it. But Suad convinced them with one sentence: "Haven't you missed sipping coffee under the oak tree in our village in the South? This is what I want to achieve."

Society was not sympathetic with Suad's decision either. People spread rumors about her that she went out "with the gun on her hip," that she acted like men, or that she went out at night with this or that man. "This was one of the reasons that hastened my decision to get married, because a married woman is entitled to everything," she says.

Kifah's parents did not approve of her participation in the war for fear of losing her as they had lost her martyred

siblings. "I would pretend that I was going to school and go train how to use weapons without their knowledge," she confesses.

Jocelyn's parents were surprised by her decision to participate in the war: "They thought I was practicing how to fire guns as one of several sports I like." But Jocelyn convinced them, saying: "My being a girl does not prevent me from realizing my capabilities and participating in the war." Society expressed its refusal by exaggerating stories about Jocelyn and describing her as a "female ogre who cuts off people's ears."

Fighting from One Corner to Another

Despite numerous battles and various kinds of combat, these women managed to survive. Fadia's first brush with war was at the age of sixteen; her participation lasted a week during which she used her building's roof as her battlefield. Fadia held a position on one corner of the roof and fought the group facing her through an opening in the wall. Her life was in danger each night. However, she almost died one night when her corner on the roof was hit by a B7 shell. The wall collapsed on Fadia and the water tanks exploded. "But I was not seriously injured," she explains. "I crawled through the water to hide in another corner after my corner became exposed."

After the roof was destroyed, Fadia had to use her room as a new battlefield, shooting a hail of bullets through the window and hitting many people. "I was told that what angered the group facing me was not that they were hit," she says, "but that they were hit by a woman." Fadia was not afraid of the battlefield as much as she was excited. After the dust had settled, she tried to resume her life naturally. However, she had to carry a



Jocelyn Khoueiry

Picture Credit: Darine Al-Omari

small gun in the pocket of her pinafore because of threats she received from the opposing group as she went to school.

Suad first ventured into the Marxist political arena at age seventeen. She participated in demonstrations and peaceful movements organized in high school. After spending a month in the "revolutionary service" imposed by the Party upon its members, Suad decided to remain at the Party's base in the South and devote herself to military actions against Israel. "Firearms were heavier than I expected," Suad recalls. She fell on her back the first time she fired a gun. "I would see fighters shudder as they pulled the trigger," she adds. "But I didn't think that the Kalashnikov would push me backwards so hard. That's when bullets whizzed in all directions," she quips.

On her first night fighting, Suad was in charge of guarding an area in the south in case of an Israeli attack. "I was more worried than terrified," she remembers. "I would imagine the trees as armed Israelis." This feeling had more to do with the concern that she would not be up to this responsibility than fear for her own life. "Because I didn't train in the use of weapons a lot, I was afraid of firing at them and not hitting them," she says. In her opinion, the operations she took part in were successful. "I was happy to fight the Israelis face to face," she says. "I felt that I was avenging my people and that was the only way to return to my homeland." Suad's happiness is not due to her hardened feelings but to the excessive sensitivity in each patriotic person. "I would cry if I saw a murdered cat," she says. "But I could step on the head of a dead Israeli. They are our enemies. I saw children who fell as victims in Kana. I lived through the Israeli terror when I was a child. I am distraught not because I killed Israelis but because I know how much they hurt us." Suad had to stop fighting five years later when she became pregnant.

Kifah has been holding in her heart a great grudge since the camps war in 1985, when most of her family was murdered, while others were arrested. "I wanted to stay in the camp to avenge my brother who was murdered, cut into pieces and tossed in the dumpster," she says with sad eyes. "I felt we were homeless and they wanted to take the camp from us much like Israel took our land. I wanted to fight to prove my existence."

Kifah first started fighting when she was fourteen years old. In addition to participating in combat, she contributed through digging trenches and filling sandbags to encircle the camp. She also baked for the fighters, tended to the wounded in hospitals, and washed sheets stained with blood. "I was scared of blood," she admits. "But because I was so angry, washing bloody sheets

became my hobby. I had no home any more. My home was the streets where I would help fighters here and tend to the sick there."

Kifah felt no weakness on the battle field "because death meant nothing to me; it was merely a funny joke." Once she decided to defy death. She and a friend (they called themselves "suffering and alienation") went for a walk around the camp which was under heavy fire. Kifah's arm was wounded, "but I did not die." Kifah was so defiant in the face of death because she couldn't care less about living after losing all her loved ones.

The issue of Martyrdom or *Jihad* gained precedence to Kifah after watching Ezzeddine El Kassem's movie, which addresses the issue of martyrdom. The movie affected her a lot and instilled in her the importance of dying for one's country. Despite the danger, Kifah refused to leave the camp until after it fell. Then, Kifah had to fight the external enemy. She was arrested after attempting to blow up an Israeli bus.

Jocelyn started her weapons training when she was eighteen in the summer camps organized by the Phalange Party. "We paid from our own allowance to get trained," she recalls. Jocelyn's first brush with war was in 1975 – she was twenty at the time. "After several clashes between the Army and the Palestinians, the Party decided to take part in the war due to the government and the Army's inability to fight back," she says.

First, Jocelyn was assigned to guard and surveillance jobs. "I felt it was a game for which I was putting my training into practice," she comments. Then, Jocelyn took part in several operations. She was put in charge of thirteen girls when she occupied for four months a building on the front line called "Al Nizamiyat."

"We occupied the building without permission," she recalls, "because it was used by the Palestinians as a post from which they would target our area. It was insane because we were in charge of protecting an entire area." Then, the building was attacked by armed Palestinians who demanded that Jocelyn surrender. "My choice was to fight back," she proudly declares. "We won and we stayed."

Jocelyn was not afraid of dying during the war. "The craziness of the war did not leave me any time to think about death," she explains. "I would neglect the simplest things about my health. I would not go to the dentist when my teeth hurt because I thought I could die the next minute."

Not Everybody Could Be a Decision-Maker

Fadia was not a decision-maker because of her young

age. She only carried out the orders of the group's Communist leader. Much like Fadia, Suad only carried out military plans "not because I was a girl but because of my lack of experience and knowledge in the correct geographic means to set up an ambush and attack the Israelis, which made it imperative to have guides and experts in charge of planning military operations."

Kifah, who was thirteen when she joined the Palestinian Woman's Union, participated in the Union's meetings, seminars, and activities such as distributing provisions to camps. Kifah refused to merely execute orders.

"Once I planned and executed an operation all by myself," she reveals. Kifah eavesdropped on one of the leaders' meetings as they planned how to deliver provisions to fighters besieged in a location called "studio." "I decided to go all by myself to deliver some batteries and food to the fighters," she explains. "I gathered the food from the camp's houses, I put the supplies in my backpack and I ran, hiding in corners to avoid the sniper's bullets, until I reached the location and delivered the supplies to the fighters."



Suad

Picture Credit: Darine Al-Omari

At first, Jocelyn carried out military orders but she gradually became one of the decision-makers in the war: "The war lingered so we stayed and we assumed responsibilities."

Special Relation Between Male and Female Fighters

Fadia describes her relations with male fighters as "good". They would indulge and favor her. "They would not let me carry a lot of baggage," she comments. "They would offer me food if I were hungry and their jackets if I were cold." Suad also describes her relation with male fighters as great. "I am still in touch with two of my best friends whom I met in war time," she admits.

Kifah also had a "special relationship" with male fighters. "They would not let me execute dangerous and difficult operations," she says. "We would shop for clothes

together and we would buy them alike." As for Jocelyn, she would be bothered by male fighters' excessive concern over her wellbeing. "I wanted to be their equal," she explains. "And I gradually made my way through their ranks. I was happy when they needed me for difficult operations."

Femininity...and the Brutality of War

The war eradicated Fadia's femininity because she felt she always had to do what her male counterparts did. She did not have the chance to deal with her body as a woman because she was a body always prepared to escape and fight. Fadia tried to compensate for her lost femininity after the war, abstaining from wearing pants and boots and replacing them with "more feminine" clothes. "The first time I wore a skirt after the war," she admits, "I felt naked and I tripped." Unlike Fadia, Jocelyn did not think about femininity: "I was so taken by the war and the escalation of events." Suad kept her hair long during the war but she would put it up. "I did not use any beauty products because it was not convenient to rouge my cheeks and go out to fight," she comments. Suad was no different from men except for the fact that she kept more stuff than they did in her military bag such as deodorant, a bar of soap, tissues, tampons and a bottle of water to wash up. "Guys did not care how they answered nature's call. But it mattered a great deal to me." Aside from that, she was not different from the men because she was always veiled and in full military gear. She would only be recognizable as a woman from her voice. Kifah couldn't care less about femininity because she always felt like a man; there was no difference between him and her except for some minor weak points. "I couldn't leave the house when I had my period, unlike men who aren't held back by such things," she notes.

Regret for Some, Happiness for Others

Fadia blames herself for being so immersed in this dirty war. "I speak consciously now," she says. "I'm against the consequences of this war." However, she justifies her part in the war as due to her being brought up in an atmosphere of war to which she had to adapt and even become part of in order to ensure that she would not die. "If I were out of the [war] game," she explains, "that meant that I would be displaced." Fadia could not afford that, either financially or because of her steadfast commitment to achieve the Party's objectives, which she describes as "make-believe." "I left the Party after it fell apart and lost its role," she explains. "I left political life due to the absence of another party capable of realizing my ambitions."

Kifah blames herself for her excessive passion which made her take part in operations, the objectives and nature of which she ignored: "I had so much anger and

rancor bottled up that I needed to release them no matter what." "Once I told a colleague in the camp: 'I wish to fight.'" So he handed her a shell to throw to the other side. "It was my mistake not to know who was on the other side," she admits.

Jocelyn does not regret taking part in the war "because my participation was clean and based on honest convictions." "The proof is that Lebanon remained a country," she adds. In her opinion, fighters have limits they should never cross, failing which they will turn into criminals. "I grew up believing in God and upholding spiritual values in war," she continues, "that's why I fought without being a killer."

War Gave Them Strength ... But Took Away Beautiful Years

Fadia is sad because the war took away the most beautiful years of her life, her childhood, her adolescence, and youth. "I immediately moved to adulthood," she says. "I never lived a day without displacement or instability." However, the war endowed her with personal strength by allowing her to live a new battle each day. "War has no tomorrow," she explains. "A person can die at any moment." The war also helped Fadia understand the political structure of Lebanon, which in turn helped her in her career as a journalist. "The war gave me a personal strength to see myself as man's equal," reflects Suad, who also learned from the war. "It gave me the strength to rise above hardships all by myself, the honor to serve my country, and the conviction to keep fighting without bearing arms."

"The war made me feel deprived and feel that I was an outcast for holding a blue card with the word refugee written on it," Kifah comments. "But it also gave me strength because an easy life no longer meant anything to me. I was born to suffer, and not to live like other human beings."

As for Jocelyn, she says the war reminded her of long wakes, weariness, ideal solidarity, emotional and popular support. "It took away from me times I could have spent in a better way," she reveals. "But it gave me the will not to live recklessly and it positively affected my beliefs. Experiencing hardships, pain, death, and sacrifice makes us better people."

Would they Participate in the War Again?

Fadia would immediately decide to emigrate with her son should war erupt again. "I do not want the war to steal from my son what it stole from me," she explains. "I want him to grow up leading a normal life." Unlike Fadia, Kifah is eager to participate in the war again. "This time my participation would be wiser and more sensible," she asserts.



Kifah Afifi

Picture Credit: Darine Al-Omari

If she were to go back in time, Jocelyn would take part in the war again. "At my age, it is somewhat difficult," she states. She would rather raise awareness among the youth so that secondary causes are not raised alongside that of the country. Jocelyn does not believe that a life bearing arms is ideal for a woman; she is against women always leading a life within a military institution.

From Women in War to Women in Society

After the war Fadia acquired a master's degree in Arabic literature. Today she works as a news bulletin chief in a media outlet. In her opinion, life is like war, be it by bearing arms or fighting to secure one's daily bread in a country that lacks the basic standards of decent living. "To me, life is two wars: One is to ensure a good life for myself and another to ensure a good life for my son," she asserts.

As for Suad, she now fights the Israelis not with weapons but through her work as a member of the

coordination committee in a popular movement, and a member of the campaign to boycott Israel. "We do not all have to bear arms," she believes. "We have other roles to play, particularly as we are witnesses to what's happening in Palestine, what's in the works for Iraq, and Lebanon and Syria afterwards."

Kifah became unemployed after the war and imprisonment, in spite of her wish to become a journalist. "Israelis did not kill our strength and tenacity with imprisonment," she asserts. "They killed our culture because they deprived us of books and culture." After her release, Kifah felt she lacked the required academic and intellectual background to enroll in a university. "I felt that my mind had ceased to work," she says. "Today, nothing is worthwhile except providing a decent life for my son and daughter." She wishes her children will become fighters to defend the Palestinian cause. "My children are Lebanese but their way of thinking is Palestinian," she adds. "My son is only three years old, but he participates in demonstrations. If someone gives him a hard time he calls him Sharon."

After the war Jocelyn completed her studies in journalism and then studied theology for five years. She is currently preparing her doctoral dissertation on "The Virgin." In 1988, Jocelyn as well as a group of former female fighters founded an association called "Al Lubnaniya: The Women of May 31," which she describes as an association that bears the country's message through the family, which is the core of society. "I defended the country during the war," she says. "But now, I am building this country with maturity and positivity."

War's Effect on Women

According to Fadia, war did not give women stability. It made them forget they were women and turned them into fighters, caretakers, or fugitives moving from one place to another to protect their children. As for Kifah, she believes that war did have a positive effect on women as it made them evolve and turned their traditional role as housewives into fighters and active participants much like men during the war. For Jocelyn, women did not use war to ascend to a political decision-making position. "Women in Lebanon do not reach any position unless they wear black and replace their fathers or husbands in the Parliament, Cabinet, or Party."

These testimonies confirm that the motive was common and unique: to rebel against the traditional roles of women which were assigned to them by society, and to prove that women can be men's equal if they so wished.

Translated by Nadine El-Khoury

Iraqi Women After the War

■ Hazem El-Amin

Journalist, Al-Hayat Newspaper

And now, after the dust of the momentous shift from Saddam Hussein's Iraq to a new, still undefined Iraq, has started to settle, Iraqi women have started their soul searching all over again. But their past wounds have

barely started healing when other wounds started to crack open; wounds from stories that occurred throughout the past decades, stories we are well familiar with, but avoid talking about because of our humanitarian weakness. And these stories we know are just a small part of what really happened.

As soon as Fatmeh entered Jalal's room, most of the friends who had been waiting for her failed to recognize her; she had become a

middle-aged, plump, and veiled woman. When her friends had left her, she was a young, beautiful woman, and the most life-loving member of the group. There she

stood before her longtime friends, whom she never replaced after they all left Baghdad, fleeing imprisonment.

The time they took to scrutinize her was long and solemn. Once they recognized her and rushed to embrace her, Fatmeh started crying. It wasn't the kind of loud crying we're familiar with, but rather, a silent weeping that made her entire body shake. It was the first moment in over 24 years – the time they had been apart – and it was like seeing herself in a mirror, as she realized what had befallen her all these years. She didn't tell them much about those years that she lived alone, far from them in that Iraq. She said that she wore the veil because it was the only protection she could have after her friends had left, and that she had put on weight because time had gone by.

The story of Fatmeh is a slow one, devoid of blood, death, murder, and it did not end in a mass grave. But it ate away the soul of this lady, just as death eats away the body.

The lives of Iraqi men and women are laden with daily bits of reality like this and even worse. Abdullah, who

recently returned to Baghdad, says that if many remained alive, it was only by accident. He believes that those who remained in Iraq under Saddam's rule have lost their ability to reach out to others. Abdullah says that when he met again with his sister, who had been the closest person to him before he fled Iraq, he found her to be almost a complete stranger, with nothing in common with the person she had been. He felt that something had died between them.

The recurring stories in Iraq have no end. For instance, there is the story of the lady who hid her sons for nearly twenty years in a room she fixed below her home, after they had been sentenced to death. She took them food and water every day, for twenty years, in that mud room underneath her house. This story seems normal to Iraqis. For twenty years, this lady regularly paid visits to the security authorities asking about her sons, so that they wouldn't have any suspicions about her and to avoid having them come to her house to investigate.

If Iraqi women were busy under Saddam's rule protecting themselves or covering up for their sons, husbands, and brothers, who could be sent to the front to kill and fight, or be imprisoned or executed, they don't seem to fare any better today.

Today, women in Iraq occupy an abstract place in the public mind. There are many indications of this, as fear from women is only equaled by the fear over them, and they are always subject to a general existential delirium. It is no coincidence that Iraqis keep repeating stories about US soldiers having binoculars that allow them to see through women's clothes and show their naked bodies. These stories no doubt aimed at instigating feelings of hostility against the American presence in Iraq, but those who started them know very well how much they can affect Iraqis and create fears about the Americans.

Targeting Women

Ishtar Jassem El Yassiri was in a narrow office, at the newspaper where she worked in Baghdad when the air conditioning suddenly shut down. It took no time before a heat wave flooded into the narrow room, where a number of editors were working on four of the newspapers that have appeared since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Ashtar, who had her hair covered with a scarf that brought out the greenness of her eyes, was the only woman in the room.

There are many women reporters in Iraq, but the lack of security that struck the country after the war has forced many of them to stay home. Ishtar, however, says that it's not the lack of security that will stop her from working. Most of the time her father or brother accompanies

her whenever she leaves her house, which is something they never had to do before the war. She considers that the calls that are beginning to warn women to wear conservative garments will not force her to neglect her work and her personal progress. She says: "We are an Islamic country, but no one can force us to wear something we don't like. No group has the right to determine what we need to do."

The conservative calls are not the only thing worrying Ishtar and Iraqi women in general. The rising number of cases of abuses of girls and women, physically and sexually, is very worrying to Iraqi families and has terrified them. This has pushed a group of university students in Baghdad to create a committee for the protection of students.

A few months after the fall of Saddam Hussein, there are still no accurate statistics on the number of women and girls who have been victims of physical and sexual abuse. This is because most victims never notify the authorities and never even resort to medical care.

The lack of security in the Iraqi capital and other cities has an obvious impact on the daily lives of women and girls, hindering their participation in public life at this decisive time in the country's history. A story such as that of Saba, who is not yet nine years old, helps to explain why many families have stopped the girls and women in their families from working or leaving the house without a male escort. In May, Saba went out of her house. She hadn't gone beyond the stairs of her building that she was abducted and taken to a nearby building, where she was raped. Later on, one of the neighbors found her sitting on the stairs bleeding, so she was taken to an American medical center, where an American woman doctor examined her and confirmed that she had been raped.

This case is just one of the few documented cases about violence against women in Iraq, as many women are afraid to talk about what happened to them and as such it is impossible to have an accurate record of these cases.

According to the *Women's Freedom Organization* in Iraq, which was formed after the fall of Saddam, there are dozens of Iraqi women who were killed by their own relatives, ever since US President George Bush announced that he was going to wage his war on Iraq last May. This

I live in daily fear, I don't have a single doubt that my father and brothers will kill me and my husband if they find us.

organization wrote to Paul Bremer, the American administration's civil governor, denouncing the wave of crimes against Iraqi women, including rape, abduction and honor crimes, but the group never received any response from the American official.

In Baghdad, where five million people reside, there are around 5,000 US trained officials. Under Saddam's rule, the rate of crime was low, mainly because the sanctions were extremely harsh and included capital punishment by hanging or firing. But today, car thefts, rape, armed burglary, and murders are widespread. This burst of violence could be explained by the fact that Saddam Hussein released 100,000 prisoners last October, including criminals and members of gangs. Today, with the

return of electricity and water, the lack of security is the number one reason for the Iraqis' resentment towards the American forces.

Last May, 463 people were taken to the morgue of Baghdad. Around eighty percent of them had died from gunshots, including some who died during celebrations. The number of casualties rose to 626 in June, to 751 in July, and 872 in August.

According to Amal, who is a 33-year-old woman: "Today, security is the greatest problem to us women in Iraq." She is on the run, fleeing from her brother and father who vowed to kill her. Amal adds: "Crimes against women are on the rise, because of the absence of law and order, and because of the presence of Islamic radicals who believe that a woman has no value, and because of those whose power has increased."

Amal realized that one day she would have to face her family's revenge, because she ran away three years ago with Ali, whom she fell in love with and later married. Ali had asked for her hand in marriage, but her family refused because he was divorced. After they married, Ali and Amal fled to the Kurdish stronghold in the North of Iraq, and settled there and had a daughter. The husband of Amal's sister divorced her because of the "shame" Amal brought upon her family. But in the Kurdish environment, Amal felt safe because she doubted that anyone from her family would have the courage to violate the travel ban that was imposed by the regime of Saddam Hussein and go to the North to take revenge on her.

But Amal's life quickly disintegrated after the war, as she no longer feels safe since Iraqis from Baghdad have now access to the North. She must remain on the run with her husband, changing her place of residence continuously, for fear of being pursued by her family. "I live in daily fear," she says, "I don't have a single doubt that my father and brothers will kill me and my husband if they find us."

Translated by Lynn Maalouf



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

The Case of Samar Alami

■ Diana Mukalled

Television producer and presenter, Future TV

In one of the cells of the high-security Holloway prison in North London, Samar Alami waits for eleven years to pass, having already spent nine years of her life there.

She was barely 31 when British courts sentenced her and her friend, Jawad Botmeh, for involvement in the 1994 bombing in London of the Israeli embassy and the Balfour House, both of which injured nineteen people.

Today Samar is 39 years old. Like Jawad, she graduated from a British university. They are both accused of affiliation with a small, radical group headquartered in Britain, which planned to foil the Middle East peace process. Both Samar and Jawad have strongly refuted this accusation.

They were condemned in 1996, even though the case was closed, the issues were not all resolved. In fact, to this day many questions remain unanswered. In recent years, new evidence and facts have appeared that indicate that intelligence services, security services, and maybe even governments were involved in this case, even though the accusations were limited to these two young people, who embody the suffering of the

Palestinian people at home and abroad. Their story remains a mystery, reminiscent of a detective story; in this case, however, many secrets are meant to be kept as such.

Samar Alami is a Palestinian girl from Gaza, born of a Lebanese mother from the Osseiran family. She was born in 1965 in Lebanon, where she lived until her early twenties. Her father Sami was the head of the Arab Bank in Beirut. She enrolled at the American University of Beirut, and then moved to Britain where she obtained a BA and then a MSc in chemical engineering from Imperial College. She is highly educated and, during her studies, was known to be a fervent activist on issues related to women's rights, the Palestinian cause, and human rights in general.

But today Samar is secluded at the Holloway prison, where visitors are allowed only three times a month. Her elderly parents and her twin sister Randa have moved to London to stay close to her.

Time goes by very slowly in prison. Samar spends it doing various prison activities, working at the library, studying, as well as reading and drawing.

When I met Samar in prison, she seemed younger than her age and not very different from the photos I had seen of her. Despite her faith in her innocence, it wasn't easy bringing her to talk about the case in which she is paying the price for an act she did not commit.

"Jawad and I have been in prison since the beginning of 1995, for a case we have no relation to at all," she says. "All that links us to it is the fact that we tried to defend our people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and this right and duty were exploited to make us appear as terrorists. They twisted everything we did and thought in a manner that would make us appear as the ones responsible for the bombing of the Israeli embassy. But we have nothing to do with this."

According to Samar and Jawad, the Israeli embassy bombing in London could not serve their goal. The Palestinians' experience in the 1970s, with all the acts of aggression in Europe, failed to explain the reality of the Palestinian cause. That is why the conviction came as a surprise to them. During the court sessions, Samar went to court carrying a red flower. She was convinced that her innocence and that of Jawad were obvious. She wasn't worried that the case would reach the point it did. "The second the sentence was announced was the worst thing that could happen to me. I had the feeling right before that something wrong was about to happen. It was a terrible moment. Twenty years fell upon me like a cold shower, when the judge announced the sentence. Yes, I was expecting them to try and blame us, but I didn't expect things to reach this point."

The sentence of Samar and Jawad appeared logical, even necessary, to many people. "The evil couple," the "two bombers," the "terrorists," "the salon revolutionaries" (in reference to their cultural and social background): Samar and Jawad were given many names in the press. Any hint that they could be innocent or that there could be a flaw in the trial seemed like abuse, amidst this media campaign.

The prominent British lawyer Gareth Peirce, who is extremely active in the defense of human rights issues, believes in the innocence of Samar and Jawad. Peirce, like numerous other people, is firmly convinced that a great mistake was made. She handled several previous cases that later were shown to involve miscarriages of justice. Her most important case was one that shook British public opinion in the late 1980s, that of the Gilford Four and Birmingham Six, named after the cities where nightclubs were blown up, killing scores of people.

This case was turned into the hit movie, released in the early 1990s, called "In the name of the Father." Several

Irish people were accused of carrying out these bombings in London nightclubs and were sentenced to fifteen to twenty years in prison; in the end, it appeared that there had been a miscarriage of justice, after the accused had spent their full terms in jail. Peirce proved the innocence and the error of the trial, in a series of famous sessions that were fraught with political meddling.

Just as Peirce was convinced of the innocence of her clients in the Irish case, she is today convinced of the innocence of Samar and Jawad. She has tried to prove their innocence since the beginning, in collaboration with the defense team.

According to her, as in many cases in which people were mistakenly convicted, people who usually don't know, who have limited experience, and who cannot help themselves are those who are usually innocent. To this day, she explains, we still don't know who carried out the bombing, and we still don't know what the political motives were. "What I am absolutely convinced of is that Samar and Jawad did not carry out these bombings," she says.

During the two-year investigation, it appeared that Samar and Jawad had rented a storage box in the Nationwide self storage building, west of London. In the box were found chemical materials and TATP power to fabricate explosives and two pistols as well as various publications, magazines, and books. But it was proven that the material found in the storage box was not the same as that used for the embassy bombing.

Samar and Jawad maintained that the quantities of material found in the storage were very limited and were intended for making bomblets. According to Samar, they were meant to be used in the Occupied Territories, not in Britain. They said that a person had given them the explosives material and then disappeared. That person remains unidentified to this day. There are in fact several aspects of the case that remain mysterious. For instance, the kind of explosives used in both incidents is not known. The material found in the storage box could not have been used for the bombings, given the latter's advanced technology. It is not known where the explosives were made. Many fingerprints were found, but the identities of the persons remain unknown.

The woman who drove the car that carried the explosives was not Samar. The bombing was extremely precise and didn't leave any trace of timing equipment or detonators.

The case was long and the story complicated, said the court judge. It's like assembling the pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle, where most of the pieces are lost. No one

knows who's responsible for the bombings. There are many questions to which the court judge responded: "Simply, we don't know." Two years after the bombing, the judge ruled that the evidence was "all circumstantial."

All the other suspects were cleared, except Samar and Jawad. Judge Garland at the Old Bailey court described the ten weeks of the trial as like "trying to hold on to soap in the bathtub."

Samar and Jawad insisted on their innocence, but the jury found them guilty. Jawad did confess that he was involved in buying both the car that blew up and the chemical material used to make the explosives. As for Samar, she confessed to having been involved in making the explosives. The judge accused them of starting a war in London and of carrying out terrorist acts. Samar and Jawad were friends. Their political activism against Israel was public and obvious. The prosecutors considered this activism as evidence of their involvement in terrorist activities.

Peirce believes that because the prosecutors decided to convict Samar and Jawad, they dropped the charges against other suspects. But questions remain, she adds, as to which party this bombing served and in whose interest it was? "It was always too easy to say that these two people were against the peace process and that this was all the case was about. Despite this, the sentence was imposed in this simplistic way to account for the bombing."

When Samar's house was searched, the police found a sketch map of Sidon, with her fingerprints on it. The map had been drawn by Randa, Samar's sister when she had wanted to visit friends there. The police and the prosecutors insisted that the map depicted the area where the Balfour House was located, in north London.

Peirce traveled to Lebanon and to Sidon specifically to check the map drawn on a notebook, and she returned with evidence that destroyed this evidence in court. Peirce considers this as a sample of the details which the police used to try to avoid having the real culprits incriminated.

Incarceration

Between 1992 and 1993, Samar and Jawad started considering ways to support the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian resistance inside the occupied territories.

"I used to view myself as a Palestinian living and studying in Britain," says Samar. "At the same time, I was trying to use my presence here in order to build strong rela-

tions with people and familiarize them with the Palestinian cause. I felt I was part of a people, and I tried with Jawad to contribute to changing the reality and confronting the suffering and injustice."

Samar and Jawad tried to think of ways to make home-made explosives, to teach Palestinians in the territories how to produce them to help them in the resistance. They were considering sending information on this material to the Occupied Territories and publishing it there, once they learned how to make these explosives.

These experiments became a major part of incriminating evidence against them during the trial, even though there was never proof of a link between these experiments and the actual bombing. Samar and Jawad tried to devise home-made explosives from material that could be found in any kitchen or grocery store. They conducted tests with materials that wouldn't be prohibited by Israeli censors, such as nail polish remover, hair dye, or shampoo.

Samar says: "There was nothing remarkable about what we were thinking about. All that we meant to do was to help develop the means of resistance. Our experiments were minor and basic. By all means, they were only modest attempts."

Peirce believes that what the two young people did was naïve, but had nothing to do with bombing the Israeli embassy: "There is no doubt, and Samar and Jawad agree with me, that many things they did were extremely stupid. This is not to incriminate them morally or politically, but simply to say that they exposed themselves to a great danger as a result of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of their attitude. Their former interests were like the kiss of death in their case. The truth is that they had common interests and individual ones; and their preparations of defensive weapons meant to be used in the Occupied Territories took up half the defense work in their case. All this needed to be clarified. The jury had no understanding whatsoever, and had no idea of international politics, except from a narrow perspective regarding the Palestinians, one close to the Israeli perspective."

The fate of Samar and Jawad was also linked to this case through a mysterious person they met in 1992. That man, whom they say bought with Jawad chemical explosive materials and convinced Samar to stock them for him, disappeared a few days before the bombing and never resurfaced. Two years prior to the embassy bombing, Samar and Jawad had met that person, who claimed his name was Rida Mughrabi. *The Independent* published a sketch of that man; the paper's correspondent Robert Fisk visited the two accused in the company of a

professional artist, who took from them the description of the so-called Mughrabi Samar and Jawad said the sketch resembled the man.

Mughrabi claimed that he was from the West Bank, that he had taught at a refugee camp in Jordan and fought the Israelis in South Lebanon in the early 1980s. He said he left Lebanon after a disagreement with the PLO. He worked in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and then moved to Birmingham in Britain after the Gulf war. Samar and Jawad never wondered why that person had suddenly appeared in their lives. Their meetings with him were infrequent and took place in London cafés. He was the one who called them, and they never met him in his own place or met anyone he knew. Samar and Jawad clung to him because of the time he had spent in Israeli jails and his work with the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. Or at least, that's what he claimed.

In 1993, Mughrabi began discussing with Samar and Jawad weapons that could be made available to the Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories. In March 1994, they started talking about techniques to make explosives. Neither Samar nor Jawad ever openly discussed with Mughrabi their experiments, but he seemed to have hands on experience in that field. He talked in an interesting way about things that had happened, and implied that he had gained his practical experience during Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

According to Samar, "Rida Mughrabi is confusing. At first, we felt that he was part of the national Palestinian movement. We felt that he had hands on experience, and that's what pushed us to work with him; but the truth is that we were wrong in dealing with people without taking enough precautions. That person put us in a situation we have nothing to do with, and disappeared." Samar and Jawad believe that Rida Mughrabi set them up in an intelligent way.

As for Peirce, she believes that the British police did not make enough efforts to investigate Mughrabi, saying "the police is not interested at all in Rida Mughrabi; they claim that such person does not exist. There are people involved in acts of aggression, and have not been tried. There was clearly a person who signed the name of George Davis, who was involved in buying the cars, and it was clear that a person called George Davis was involved in other activities. It is clear that a woman, or a man disguised as a woman, parked the car near the Israeli embassy, and it was admitted that none of these people were the accused. So it's neither Samar nor Jawad."

In March 1994, Samar attempted new experiments, but

she failed and this failure led to an incident with Rida Mughrabi. They met and she told him about her failure in making an explosive out of acetone and hydrogen. Her last contact with him was on July 13, 1994, two weeks before the embassy bombing. He asked to see her, and they met on a street in London. He said that he had carried out some experiments and had something that could help her which he wanted to give her. Samar says that she acted against her instinct at that moment, and felt that things were going in the wrong direction. She hesitated, but ended up accepting two boxes from him, which she carried from his car to hers. The box included TATP, which is used for explosives, and there were also timers and other things.

Rida said that he was leaving and, after he gave her the two boxes, she never saw him again. He disappeared. Samar speaks about her last meeting with him, in a very distrustful way, saying: "It was a very strange encounter. There are many people who come to Britain and leave things behind. But what was stranger was his hesitation when he gave me the boxes. At first, I thought it was unnatural. I was bothered by the fact that usually, I don't act in such a naïve way, but I thought that maybe he was going through some important phase and had something on his mind. I felt that something was wrong, but I didn't give it enough thought, and I ended up keeping with me something I never should have kept."

Samar and Jawad decided to put the two boxes temporarily in an empty apartment belonging to a relative of hers. They later rented under false names a storage box at the Nationwide self storage, and put the two boxes there. Jawad added: "Up to that point, we had only been experimenting with negligible quantities, in my kitchen; but in one day, the quantities changed, and even though they weren't considerable, they marked a qualitative leap from what we were familiar with, as far as what they were and what they could do. So we decided to put them in a storage box, wanting to get rid of the material as quickly as possible."

Five months passed between the date of the bombing and their arrest. But neither Jawad nor Samar could decide to get rid of the storage box or its contents; instead, they hid some books and notes related to their experiments. According to Samar: "We were afraid there would be a reaction similar to what happened during the Gulf war [1991] when people were being randomly arrested. It was a period filled with questionings and confusion regarding the embassy bombing, and the real motive. Also, my encounters with Rida further raised my doubts, but we didn't know what we should do."

The prosecution considered that what had been discovered in their storage box was what was left of the chemical material that was used to make the explosives. But the investigations didn't prove that the material that was found in the storage, and specifically the TATP, was used in the explosion, and the courts' experts even doubted this hypothesis, saying that TATP is an unstable material that was not suitable for that purpose. The court finally decided that there was a unanimous agreement that this material hadn't been used in either of the two bombings.

Rida Mughrabi disappeared, leaving big question marks behind. According to Samar, not only did he leave many questions, but he also left her and Jawad in an insecure situation: "We did not participate in the embassy bombing operation; it's not that we don't want to confess, it's because we really have no relation with it, and Rida Mughrabi left us in a situation that we are not responsible for in any way."

Officials from the anti-terrorist branch testified during the trial that there was a flaw in the investigations regarding this case. There was a lot of talk about Israeli security fears. It was noteworthy that the day the sentence was issued, the media that usually talked about the need to tighten security around Jewish centers decided to focus on Jawad and Samar, depicting them as individuals hostile to Jews. Suddenly, they focused on the fact that Samar had participated in a public meeting in London, where Shimon Peres had spoken.

The press and the prosecution presented this as if Samar had gone to the meeting to determine the target of her attack. Peirce says: "It is clear that the Israeli embassy was the target of the bombing. The embassy's staff were prosecution witnesses, and whatever cooperation they had in this case, it was exclusively between the Israelis, the prosecution and the British scientists. We still believe that we were not given a full report on what the Israeli experts found when they went to the scene of the bombing. It is worth noting that Israeli scientists visited the crime scene, and not only that, but they also interviewed eyewitnesses, which is understandable. But the prosecution didn't do anything similar, and did not interrogate any witnesses. That is why, to this day, there are certain aspects of the scientific investigation that could help in elucidating this case, and they are neither in the hands of the prosecution, nor are we aware of them."

The case did not end in 1996 with the prosecution of Samar and Jawad; the defense lacked significant information during the trial, and later during the appeal. Several closed hearings were held under the Law on

Public Interest Immunity (PII), which gives the government the authority to withhold certain evidence in order to protect national security. These sessions were used to keep secret information related to evidence that could benefit the defense, including information that the British intelligence had about a warning the Israeli embassy received before the incident. This information had been withheld from the defense. The sessions also prevented the disclosure of information related to the investigations of the British and Israeli government regarding the two explosions. The sentence was issued, even though this information remained secret.

Secret intelligence reports also mentioned the possibility that the attack against the Israeli embassy could be part of the secret war between Iran and Israel or even done by Israel. Information leaks caused this speculation, based on the ease with which the attack was carried out against the embassy. Were the Israelis trying to highlight the frailty of their security, after the British authorities had refused to enhance the embassy's protection and had prohibited Mossad from working on its territory?

In 1999, the court of appeal held a secret session in the presence of the public prosecution. During the session, the public prosecution confirmed the truth that the British intelligence had received a warning about an attack, which hadn't been disclosed during the trial. Given that the trial wasn't fair, the court of appeal gave Samar and Jawad the right to appeal the sentence. But the last appeal also failed, and presently their lawyers are proposing to bring the case to the European court. But this will take at least two to three years.

Their lawyer Gareth Peirce comments: "Naturally, I'm worried that there is a real danger that they could spend the whole term of their sentence in jail."

Samar and Jawad follow the developments in their case from prison. Peirce describes this as another case of miscarriage of justice, saying "we don't have the ability to know what was hidden and we don't care to know. These matters will remain classified until the time comes when the governments decide that it is in their best interest to disclose them. But the situation is difficult and it is impossible to defend a case that involves political motives, regardless of what these are. In the absence of an unexpected, fundamental issue that cannot be ignored, I think that the result will remain the continuation of a new case of miscarriage of justice in Britain."

Translated by Lynn Maalouf

A Journalist Diary: On the Horrors of War

■ Diana Mukalled

Television producer and presenter, Future TV

While preparing the many episodes of her program "Through the Naked Eye" Diana Mukalled was able to visit several war-torn countries. In this diary she sheds light on the situation of women at times of war by presenting testimonies from four conflict areas in the Arab world namely Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait and Western Sahara.

Algerian Women: Suffering in Silence

Algerian women were the primary targets of the fundamentalist violence that flared up thirteen years ago in Algeria and is still taking place today. During the late eighties several Islamic fundamentalist groups mushroomed and adopted the name "Enforcement of Virtue

and Suppression of Vice" (al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahi'an al-munkar). Those groups were active in villages and popular areas where they inspected women and girls' mode of dress. Moreover, mosques served as the meeting place of the Islamist groups, where they delivered their speeches and *fatwas* (religious edicts).

Initially, the guerrilla warfare targeted security forces. Armed groups raped and killed the wives, daughters, and sisters of members of security forces (taghout). In addition, many women were abducted and kidnapped by Islamic militants; they were taken to the mountains where they were held as hostages in guerrilla camps. A lot of them were killed and their bodies left unattended. There are no official figures on the number of abducted women, yet it is estimated to be around several thousand.

The armed Islamist groups used to refer to *fatwas* (religious edicts) that allowed them to inflict violence on women of the Taghout (security forces). According to the guerrillas, given that the government persecuted and harassed their families who were incarcerated in detention camps, they had the right to do the same thing. "When penalized exact the same penalty on the perpetrator."

Talks are underway and civil consensus might end the crisis, yet, there is no doubt that Algerian women have been tragically ignored by their government and forgotten by the national and international media. Days, months, and years have passed and have managed to make them more introverted and lonely. Support for the victims on the part of the government, organizations, and even family and friends withers with the passage of time. Most victims still live in terror of the crisis that befell their families.

Targeting women is no coincidence. The Islamists emphasize in their discussions and *fatwas* the importance of persecuting women by raping and killing them. Women were the primary targets.

Below are three testimonies narrated by victims, including a child who managed to escape death after being hit with a hatchet on the head. Even though *fatwas* were issued prohibiting the target of children, fundamentalist violence had an effect on the lives of most Algerian citizens. The purpose of presenting these case studies is not only to uncover the grave human rights violations that have affected women. The aim is also to examine the victims' situations after time has passed.

Malika

I hate the dark, it scares me ... Whenever I hear noises or shouting it all comes back to me. That night I felt like my heart was being ripped from my ribcage .. Two years have passed, my situation has improved, however, the death scenes that I saw will always stay with me ... There are no words to describe that night ... I really don't know how I have survived till today ... Yes, I am still afraid ... It's a fear that one can never get used to."

While recounting the incident Malika's face became cold and ... her voice was so neutral and her tone devoid of any emotion or expression to the extent that one could assume she was recounting events that someone else had experienced... Only the look on her face and her eyes staring at the horizon were evidence that she lived through a horrible tragedy. Malika managed to escape being killed in the massacre of Bentalha because of a fire that prevented the Islamists from getting to her. She was an onlooker to the killing of 200 members of her village including her mother and older sister.

Malika now lives with her father and younger siblings, who scatter around her while she hangs the worn out clothes she has washed. After the death of her mother



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

and elder sister she became responsible for her siblings, the eldest of whom is eleven years old. A terrified and troubled look has replaced the mischievous one normally detected on young peoples' faces and this is especially seen on the face of Ratiba, the youngest of the lot, who is now almost six years old.

One can hardly hear noises in the village of Bentalha, a deadly silence prevails that masks personal agony. Mud and dust is all one can see; the streets, houses, and even the clothes of the inhabitants fail to strike onlookers. The muddy, uneven, and narrow streets are filled with children playing to kill time. The inhabitants are poor and lead a dull, yet normal life. Bentalha, even though only twenty minutes away from the capital, seems like an ancient village. In it one of the worst massacres in the history of Algeria took place in 1997. The death toll in the villages of Bentalha, Rais and Al-Arba'e added up to approximately 1000 individuals, most of whom were slaughtered. Malika's younger siblings were spared because the assailants, in their haste to flee the area, didn't have time to kill them. They were thrown from the window of an apartment where they were hiding; they were on the second floor. They suffered broken bones but they survived.

" It was 11 p.m. when they came ... We were at home, we heard screams and loud noises in the background. Little by little the sounds got nearer ... We could not understand what they were saying ... I knew that the death that we had tried to flee when we left our village Blat was close ... we came to Bentalha, thinking that it was safer than Blat ... I realized how naive we were ... There was no time to think ... We dashed to our neighbor's house, terror got hold of us, and we scattered aimlessly ... I hid on the roof of a house and my younger siblings hid on its ground floor ... My mother and older sister fled to another neighbor's house. The attackers came from the fields nearby and entered our neighborhood ... I saw

them storm into houses and was about to faint when I heard them entering our house ... I heard the sounds of bloodshed ... sounds of throats being slit. I heard the slain gasp for their last breath ... I heard knives piercing chests, ... dying moans muffled, only the screams of the assailants were heard. I saw them enter the village from the hills nearby. They were wearing Afghani robes, most

of them had bushy disgusting beards with long hair, and some had long nails. They were armed with knives, axes, swords, and rifles.

"I heard them call people by their names and kill them; it was obvious that they were accompanied by people who knew the village well. I couldn't comprehend what was happening. I was shivering and felt I was going to die. I didn't see them slaughtering my mother and two sisters. After the armed men left my father told me what had happened. However, I saw them throw my siblings from the window. Moreover, while hiding on the roof I saw three of the armed men in front of me. I was so terrified I froze. I was unable to utter a word; my throat was so dry and hoarse. One of them looked at me and started waving his knife in my direction. A neighbor grabbed my hand and shoved me toward the rooftop; since the house was on fire they couldn't get to us.

"I screamed a lot but no one came to our rescue. What I saw grieved me a lot. Pools of blood, corpses, and children slaughtered, crying, wailing, and screaming... I felt very paralyzed; death was the only thing real in this surreal tragedy. I felt that God had deserted us, I felt so alone and sensed that no one gave a damn about what had befallen us.

"The murderers remained in the village for six hours. I heard them laughing and saw them enter into a shop to eat before they resumed their deadly mission. Ten minutes after their departure the police arrived ... I really do not know up until now why they didn't come earlier?

"The fields they crossed to get to us were totally destroyed ... but the houses they burned down and ruined were restored rapidly. There were many survivors, given that the village was inhabited by four thousand individuals ... who live in very gloomy, unattractive, and unsafe houses. Many houses had doors made of zinc, which explains the killers' easy access... The houses, shabby and faded, do not offer any security or protection for the inhabitants. Moreover, they lack the refined architectural style old Algerian houses are famous for. "

Malika, who is twenty years old, rarely leaves the house, especially when it's dark. She is in charge of the household and leads a very isolated life. The inhabitants of Bentalha are mostly unemployed, as is the case with very many Algerians. Since the massacre, her unemployed father roams the streets of the village aimlessly. The whole family lives off the 8000 Algerian dinars, equivalent to 100 US dollars, the government allotted to them in compensation to what has befallen them. The endless negotiations and talks aimed at reconciliation do not address the worries and future outlook of Malika. She

doesn't know the actual killers who massacred her loved ones. All she knows is that everyone is accountable. "I don't support anyone ... I don't know if the killers belong to the Islamist camp or are government people."

Malika's answers are unstructured and fragmented. She doubts everyone and everything: "The Government? Everyone doubts the government ... The army was there and so were members of the patriot guards: Why didn't they intervene to stop what was happening? As soon as the gunmen left they arrived. Why is that? Why didn't they come earlier? Nothing has ended and I really do not understand the highly publicized so called peace and reconciliation they are talking about. Massacres are still taking place. No one cares about us. All they care about is tranquility and peace in the cities and the capital. As far as the villages are concerned, no one cares what happens over there. We are the ones being killed and slaughtered. All I dream about is to be able to leave this country. I am so sick and tired of being afraid. I am still scared of the dark. So are my siblings and my father. There is no guarantee that the murderers will not come back. "

Nacira

Nacira's physical appearance and personality hardly resemble the picture one draws in one's mind. She is barely thirteen years old, fair in complexion with wide eyes. She has a friendly face and often smiles, but her smile rarely reaches her eyes. Her built is weak, her body frail, and her walk unsteady. One notices that she stumbles at times. When I met her she was wearing a red shirt that was too loose on her; it had to be for someone else. Her thick hair covers a head injury she sustained two years ago. With her hands Nacira parted her hair to reveal a very deep scar caused by an ax wound she received on her head when armed men attacked her parents' house in the village of Rais two years ago. Many people died during the attacks, including her mother and brother. Nacira got used to people's curiosity to see her scar. She does not hesitate to show her scar to anyone interested in inspecting it. Her hands move mechanically parting the hair to expose the scar. She recounts to the onlookers the details of the attack in a low, controlled, and expressionless voice. Her answers are short and to the point. Nacira describes the gunmen as "normal people like you and me ... with beards and long hair ... They use our dialect." She continues, "I don't remember much. I saw them kill my mother and younger brother. I was very scared. Upon seeing the armed man moving towards me with an ax in his hand I felt numb all over and fainted." Even though she fainted before she was attacked what she saw is enough to keep her awake at night, even two years later.

Life is ordinary and runs smoothly in Nacira's village; yet, it is not normal. After the incident, the inhabitants of Rais

lead an introverted and lonely life. After the death of her mother and since her father had to move to the city for work, Nacira was forced to move in with some relatives, since she could not live on her own. Her physical state prevents her from leading a normal life. When she leaves the house she has to be accompanied, since the head injury created a cavity to the skull. This renders any minor injury or accident life threatening.

Al-Zhra'

"I live with my two children in my house at the village. I'm a divorcee; my husband left me a long time ago and I know nothing about him. I work as a house-help to make ends meet and feed my family. I feel worthless and cheap after what happened to me. The whole village knows my story. Whenever they see me walking on the street they start talking about what happened to me: 'Look at her. Do you know what happened to her?' They gossip about me blatantly, indifferent to the fact that I can hear them."

"On that day - it was the summer of 1995 - I was home with my two children. My parents were not home. Three armed men broke into the house; the plan was to abduct me. They attacked me and started dragging me towards the door. I resisted. I didn't want to go with them. I knew what awaited me as I had heard many stories about abducted women who are taken to the mountains where they are raped and slaughtered. Many of our female neighbors were abducted and taken to the mountains where they were raped, killed, and thrown in valleys. One of the many women returned to the village after ten days in captivity but refused to say a word about what had happened to her.

"I cried and screamed, imagining what might become of me. I was terrified; my children started crying and clung to me. One of the armed men started hitting me with a razor blade while his accomplice moved towards me. They are monsters, for sure, not human. They had long beards, looked filthy, and had a horrible smell. I knew who they were; they used to live next to our house. Two years prior to my attack, they burned down our house and kicked us out of the village because my brothers were policemen. Given that our village was backed by the Islamists, the armed men got away with murder.

"One of them started telling me that the *Emir* (leader of

I don't remember much. I saw them kill my mother and younger brother. I was very scared.

... while hiding on the roof I saw three of the armed men in front of me. I was so terrified I froze.

the group) had ordered them to abduct me, so I had to go with them to the mountains. I sobbed and screamed, 'Why do you want to take me? What have I done in order to warrant such a punishment?' and they answered 'Your brothers are with the Taghout. That is why. You will come with us and we will release you only when they stop working with the government.' I struggled. The more I resisted the deeper the razor knife thrust against my flesh. One of them started undressing me and they raped me one after the other. I cried out, begging them to stop, but they were indifferent; they raped me in my father's house with my children and the entire village as their witnesses. The villagers did not dare interfere at first, but then some summoned up their courage and begged them not to take me with them. They complied and left me bleeding and traumatized with my shocked children surrounding me. I felt I was dying and prayed not to live another day. They violated me in front of the villagers and my children."

"After the incident I started visiting a psychiatric help center in my village. I go there twice a week, yet I still feel very insecure. I am barely surviving ... I have no life, no friends, and sometimes no food ... Our society is harsh, there is no compassion ... We Arabs are merciless. Even though people witnessed what happened to me they still consider me an outcast ... I was rejected by my own people even though I was not to blame ... The terror still persists ... They would be lying if they say it is over ... Wander around and you will see them ... Nothing changed for them ... We were the ones who were violated and no one really cares."

"I am lost; I no longer dream. All my earlier dreams vanished. Whenever I am reminded of the incident I wish I were dead."

Translated by Myriam Sfeir

Kurdish Women in Iraq

When Kirkuk, the Iraqi city heavily populated with Kurds, fell last April after the defeat of Saddam Hussein's armed forces, thousands of Kurds returned to the city they were expelled from, the city they consider their capital. Among the endless queues of cars and pedestrians were several old military pickups with female peshmerga (Kurdish

fighters) in them. The women and girls whose ages ranged between 18 and 45 wore green uniforms and waved their arms in joy. They roamed around the city in their military pickups watching the return of the Kurds. Unlike Western women fighters, these women are not professional fighters, they comprise only a hundred persons and lack heavy weaponry.

Tinor, who is barely twenty-six years old, could not believe that she had returned to the city from which she and her family were expelled. They had suffered a lot at the hands of the Iraqi forces. The Iraqi soldiers forced her father to leave Kirkuk and imprisoned her uncle in 1995. That was their punishment for refusing to join the Baath party and renounce their Kurdish identity. Tinor asserts that the Kurds have endured the worst atrocities at the hands of Saddam's regime. Kurds were forced to renounce their Kurdish identity and adopt the Arab one: if they declined, displacement, imprisonment, or hanging was the punishment. The mass killings and forced displacement were the main reasons that Tinor joined the Kurdish women fighters who aimed to liberate the Kurdish people. Tinor enlisted in 1997, in the Kurdish city of Sulaimanyya in the self-rule area that was outside the control of the Iraqi regime. There, she received military training. She had no qualms about a US invasion and all she wanted was for the US to bring down the ruling Iraqi regime.

According to Lieutenant Sarwat Ismail, the supervisor who commands the women's brigade, "Most of the women and girl fighters have lost loved ones as a result of the regime's infamous massacres where thousands of Kurds were killed. The Kurds lived for the day the regime would fall, it's the only thought that kept them going and succeeded in lifting their spirits. We are very happy that the regime fell and we can now enjoy our freedom."

Although women increasingly join the peshmerga, that does not imply that Kurdish women are predominantly in it or that they are active participants in political debates or political life. Kurds belong to tribes that are conservative and traditional, and so it is hard for women to break away from the conservative chains imposed on them. Kurds have suffered grave human rights violations and endured internal displacement and massacres for decades. However, Kurdish women suffered more given that they sometimes suddenly found themselves heads of households responsible for the sustenance of their families.

Sadriat, who is in her late forties, survived Saddam Hussein's infamous 1988 Anfal campaign. His regime accused the Kurds of collaborating with Iran against Iraq, so he ordered his troops to demolish many Kurdish villages. Around 4,000 villages were erased and 200,000 Kurds killed. It is believed that many Kurds were trans-

ported to Iraq's southwestern desert where they were executed and buried in mass graves. Sadria lost her husband, brother, and his four children. After the massacre, she moved with what was left of her family to Shamshamal refugee camp in the Kurdish area, a short distance from where Iraqi soldiers were stationed. After the fall of the regime, the situation changed but Sadria and her family still live in the refugee camp awaiting financial help that will enable them to return to their village and rebuild their house.

Sadria cannot hold back her tears as she recalls the horrors of Anfal. She now lives with her elderly mother, who barely remembers her age. All she recalls with certainty is that she experienced the terror of World War II at a very young age. Over the years several wars took place, since there were so many she fails to remember them all.

"Since a very young age I've experienced nothing but the miseries of war ... All I know is wars ... wars, wars ... Who in God's name wants that? I want to live in peace. I literally have no one left. My son and his children were murdered ... What do you know about our suffering?" On this sad note the elderly lady ends her conversation and withdraws, refusing to say anything more; remembering is too painful.

Close to Erbil in northern Iraq one finds the refugee camp of Benswala where thousands of Kurdish refugees live. They were deported from Kirkuk and other areas under the Iraqi rule. Around a million Iraqi Kurds left their homes in 1991, a quarter of whom were subject to Saddam Hussein's policy of Kurdish annihilation. Practiced for decades in order to restore the imbalance in the population, Saddam Hussein allowed the Kurds the chance to stay only if they renounced their non-Arab heritage and registered themselves as Arabs. He also forced Kurds out of Kirkuk and brought in Arabs, mostly from the South, a policy most Kurds refer to as Saddam's version of ethnic cleansing. Most Arabs who moved there received free accommodation; they were offered the houses of the displaced Kurds to live in as a present from Saddam Hussein. "We were coerced to change our nationality ... to become Arabs if we wanted to stay."

Rahmeh, a Kurdish woman from Kirkuk, recounts that her family was expelled from their village after her brothers refused to join Al-Quds army, most of whose soldiers were Kurds who had been forced to join. She asserts: "We were visited by members of the Baath Party who urged my brothers to join their party or do their military service. After my brothers refused they threw us out of



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

Kirkuk. I am certain that our future will be better now that the reign of Saddam Hussein is over."

When people describe Iraqi Kurdistan, they admit that it is a big refugee camp, although the months that followed the fall of the regime have slightly improved the situation. Most inhabitants in the refugee camps are survivors of the many wars that befell the country. Today chaos prevails regarding the return of refugees who await financial help to be able to go back to their villages and rebuild their demolished houses. A lot of killings and confrontations were reported among Arabs, Turkumans, and Kurds as a result of the deportations and confiscation of houses that took place in the earlier period.

Translated by Myriam Sfeir

Kuwaiti Women and the Invasion of Kuwait in 1990

The end of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's reign coincided with the uncovering of painful and horrifying facts. The frequent discovery of mass graves in Iraq is one of the most painful daily occurrences. Whenever a new mass grave is discovered hundred of mothers and family members

rush in a desperate attempt to find out what had happened to their loved ones who had disappeared several years ago. Among the disappeared are six hundred Kuwaitis captured by the Iraqi army during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Among the Kuwaiti families awaiting news of their loved ones is Masha'el's family; they live for the day they find the body (corpse) of Badr, the eldest brother, captured by the Iraqi army during the Iraqi invasion.

While Masha'el recounts the details of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the abduction of her brother, one has a feeling that the events took place yesterday and not thir-

teen years ago. Masha'el narrates the story with emotion: "I was 18 years old, I had dreams, dreams that most girls of my age shared, namely graduating and securing a university degree, getting married, and starting a family of my own. I still remember the first few seconds that followed the Iraqi invasion. It was dawn ... I can still hear the deafening sounds emanating from the Iraqi Helicopters. It was shockingly unexpected."

Masha'el continues: "Badr was very disturbed and furious because of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The assault affected him tremendously to an extent that he lost his voice and was unable to speak on the first day of the occupation. He communicated with us by using sign language. The following day, on the 4th of August 1990, Badr left the house in the evening and never came back. His friends informed us that the Iraqi army captured him off the streets. We can never forget that day, the years are passing and the pain is still terrible."

Badr was taken into custody when he was barely 20 years old. His widowed mother and two sisters are still suffering as a result of his absence. His mother recounts while weeping: "Badr was very young when they arrested him. Being the 'man of the house' he used to take care of us. He was very kind and affectionate. Since they arrested him I have been living against my will. Living without him is very difficult."

Masha'el admits that due to Badr's absence she had to be in charge of the family. She asserts: "We are an Eastern conservative family and the presence of a man is highly needed in our society. The man whether a brother, father, or son is the head of the household and the provider. Hence, Badr's abduction robbed us of our provider and we are left alone, four women, to fend for our self with no man to protect us. I am now the head of the household and am responsible for all matters that are usually relegated to the men in the family. For instance, I take the car to the garage in case it breaks down. Moreover, I am expected to handle all transactions in ministries. This in our society is usually a man's job. You rarely find women in such places (garages, ministries, etc). We feel very alone, isolated and lifeless. We no longer mingle with people because we are unpleasant company. People get depressed when around us so we cut-off ourselves from people."

The Iraqi government took advantage of the long-standing territorial dispute with Kuwait to justify its invasion by claiming that Kuwait was a southern Iraqi province and was therefore rightfully Iraq's. Besides, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was nonchalant about openly declaring his ulterior motives namely possessing the material resources (fuel and money) that belonged to

Kuwait. According to Saddam Hussein, Iraq had defended all the Gulf region against the threat the Khomeini regime posed and so Kuwait had to contribute to the war expenses.

Despite the fact that during the Iran-Iraq conflict, Kuwait and most countries of the Gulf sided with Iraq, Saddam Hussein went ahead and invaded Kuwait. His actions shocked and angered the Kuwaitis a great deal. They regretted ever supporting Saddam Hussein ... Saddam's forces thus invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and declared it as its 19th province. Kuwait was under siege for a period of seven months after which the U.S.-led coalition launched operation "Desert Storm" thus forcing Saddam Hussein to retreat.

For seven months the Iraqi army imposed a brutal security regime on Kuwait ... theft, larceny, destruction, abduction, arrests, torture and killings are but a few of the many violations the Kuwaitis had to endure. Schools and governmental institutions were turned into detention centers ... The Iraqis systematically looted Kuwait and destroyed what they could not take with them. Government property ... oil fields were set on fire and Kuwait's days were turned into night.

Grave human rights violations were committed by the Iraqi troops. As a result of the Iraqi invasion, 500 Kuwaitis died after suffering the worst kinds of torture that included beatings, whipping, burns, acid baths, electric shocks, electric drills, amputating joints, cutting off ears and tongues, gouging of eyes, dismemberment and ax beatings, as well as extracting nails. Iraqi troops in their detention centers committed brutal acts of violence and left a large numbers of victims thus causing enormous human suffering to the Kuwaiti population.

Um Mansour, who currently lives in one of the suburbs of the Kuwaiti capital Kuwait city along with her youngest son, is another victim of war. She suffered greatly because of the Iraqi invasion. She lost her eldest son, Mansour, and was incarcerated along with her two remaining sons, Saleh and Mohammad during the invasion. She was held prisoner along with her youngest son, Mohammad, in the Iraqi detention centers found in the South of Iraq. They were freed during the Shiite uprising in 1991.

Mohammad, who was very young when his brother was captured and killed, recounts: My brother's body was found in a garbage dump next to our house in Kuwait. He was disfigured beyond recognition due to the torture by electric shocks he was subjected to. Moreover, his nails were extracted. While Mohammad was talking his mother was weeping and lamenting the loss of her sons. Since

the invasion she lost the ability to speak and so crying is her only means of expressing her grief. Mohammad continues: "My mother is still very affected by what has befallen us, our house is filled with pictures of my two brothers. My mother cries all day and thinks of nothing but her misfortune. She lost a son in a tragic way and knows nothing about her other son. We are re-living the tragedy each and every day."

Rape

Among the many problems suffered by the Kuwaiti people as a result of the Iraqi invasion is the issue of rape and mass rape. A number of girls and women were subjected to sexual assault at the hands of the Iraqi soldiers. Eyewitness accounts arising

from the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait confirmed that the Iraqi regime committed grave sexual assault. Moreover, government officials also confirmed the existence of rape. In a conservative society like Kuwait talking about such matters is a taboo. Given that rape is a very sensitive subject to discuss, many families, whose women have been raped, cover up the matter and surround it with a veil of secrecy. It is practically impossible to find a rape victim willing to openly talk about what had happened to her. However, many Kuwaiti detainees testify that they witnessed women being raped by Iraqi soldiers.

It has been estimated that around 700 Kuwaiti girls and women were raped, by Iraqi soldiers, during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Rapes were either carried out in front of those women's parents or in Iraqi camps. Treating rape victims in Kuwait was handled very delicately, a lot of secrecy surrounds this issue till date. In order to conceal the identity of the victims no names were mentioned, victims were referred to by numbers. Because of the rape crisis, the grand Mufti of Al-Azhar issued a *fatwa* declaring abortion legal if performed on rape victims who got impregnated by Iraqi soldiers. However, the issue of raped women who got impregnated and gave birth is still an unresolved one in Kuwait. Moreover, it is important to note that those women are outcasts in their own society and are still struggling to be reintegrated into Kuwaiti society.

Adel Al-Mutairi, a university professor and Imam, is another victim of war. He was detained during the Iraqi invasion on pretext that he was a member of the Kuwaiti resistance. He was then sentenced to death and narrow-

Several soldiers tore at her clothes wildly while the girl screamed hysterically till she fainted.

ly escaped death one day before his execution after being freed thanks to the uprising in the South of Iraq. Adel admits that he endured brutalities and torture at the hands of the Iraqi soldiers. Yet, he asserts that what affected him the most was witnessing the rape of girls and women in front of their families. He recounts: "On the eighth day of the invasion the soldiers brought in the sister of one of the prisoners detained with us. Several soldiers tore at her clothes wildly while the girl screamed hysterically till she fainted. They assaulted her and gang raped her consecutively in front of us. After witnessing the rape of his sister, her brother lost his mind. God help him. I can still hear her cries and pleas; she suffered a lot." Adel asserts that as a result of the war, he witnessed horrifying rapes that he will never forget. He recounts that most rape victims were gravely assaulted and their screams and cries used to echo throughout the camp. Those women were seriously traumatized and they are currently undergoing treatment. Their progress, however, is very slow.

The Iraqi regime detained around 6000 hostages that included Kuwaiti men, women and children as well as foreign nationals. Sometimes entire families were captured randomly off the streets or were arrested for secretly engaging in resistance activities to counter the occupation ... Some hostages were freed and their return was facilitated by the red cross when the occupation ended. Moreover, a great number of detainees were liberated during the Shiite uprising that followed Kuwait's liberation and that take took place in the South of Iraq in 1991. Unlike the detainees held in the southern parts of Iraq, those jailed in Baghdad remained in prison. The fate of the 600 remaining prisoners is still unknown, yet, it is worth mentioning that following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime the bodies of around 8 Kuwaiti prisoners were found in mass graves in Iraq.

Among the 600 remaining detainees there are around 65 foreign nationals. Amongst them is a Lebanese woman, Daad Al-Hariri, born and raised in Kuwait, who was taken prisoner by Iraqi forces for being active in the Kuwaiti national resistance. Her remains were found thirteen years later, through DNA testing, in a mass grave in Al-Samawah area in Iraq in July 2003. Reports confirm that she was executed, along with several other prisoners of war, in 1991. Daad's family suffered a lot throughout those thirteen years. Her father's only wish was to see his daughter before he died. He passed away in 1998 without fulfilling his wish. Her mother spent the past thirteen years hoping she will see her daughter again. She now leads a lonely and miserable life.

Translated by Myriam Sfeir

Western Sahara: A Forgotten Crisis

The Western Sahara is one of the last unresolved issues in North Africa. Due to its location south of Morocco, east of Algeria and north of Mauritania it has been subject to incessant regional political interferences.

In 1975, Spain withdrew from the area after having occupied it for over ninety years. Spain had barely left when Moroccan forces entered and took control over the Sahara, claiming a historical right of sovereignty over this land. And since then, an armed conflict has pitted the Sahrawis, who demand independence, against Morocco, which wants to extend its sovereignty over the region. Various other parties and states have also become players in the conflict. In 1991, a ceasefire was announced in accordance to a UN-sponsored peace plan and, to this day, the international body is still trying to work out a peace settlement.

In the depths of the Saharan desert lies a tiny, desolate republic called the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which was called as such by the Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro, better known as the Polisario Front. This republic stretches along the borders with Morocco, and the Front has been locked in a bitter conflict with the Moroccan forces, in what has become the longest conflict in North Africa. There are two main groups: one lives in the Saharan region controlled by Morocco since 1975, while the largest part lives as migrants in border camps near Tinduf, south of Algeria, while still and others are in Northern Mauritania.

The Tinduf camps enjoy a semblance of self-rule, as the Polisario has controlled the region since it was officially established in 1973, decades after fighting the Spanish colonialists and later the Moroccan forces. There, in the depths of the desert, clusters of homes are spread out on a piece of land that has no strategic importance, except for that long-forgotten conflict.

The mud houses and tents barely provide any protection to the 150,000 Sahrawis living there. Drinking water is scarce and the living conditions are bad, while the camps have managed to survive thanks to the scanty help they obtain.

In this inhospitable environment, Sahrawi women walk in the streets in colored dresses, grabbing the attention



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

of outsiders and bringing warmth into the mud houses and alleys. With their rich variety of bright colors, they create a sense of vitality amidst the lusterless sand. The role they play in the camps is easy to note, as they are the ones who almost entirely organize life in the camps, given that most men live there only intermittently, when they return from their army service. The majority of men are almost always absent. And those men who are not in the army wander into the Sahara for several months to herd the cattle. So the women are generally left alone to care for the family and manage the camps.

This reality has imposed certain roles on women, who hold positions in the Polisario Front committees and councils as well as in administration and education. They are also in charge of the family and their households. Most often, the Sahrawi women are bold, and give the impression that they run the desert camps. Despite the harsh living conditions, the Sahrawi

refugees try to hold on to their traditions. Marriage for instance is greatly encouraged by the Sahrawis and the Polisario itself, as the Front organizes the wedding ceremonies and offers a place of residence to newly-weds, which is in fact a mud house. It also pays for the weddings of those couples wishing to raise new generations of "revolutionaries"!

Sayla is a young Sahrawi woman, besides her household responsibilities, she is pursuing her education. Like so many Sahrawi women, she has gone through military training in camps especially set up for women in the depths of the desert. According to Sayla: "I like to learn and work, and whatever a man does, a woman can do as well. In the summer, the students return from the cities where they are learning and us women, we hold military training sessions to learn how to carry weapons and fight. We are still calling for our independence, and despite the fact that there have been no armed clashes

for a while, we need to be always prepared and cannot relinquish our dream of having our own independent state one day.”

Sayla's mother, Om Said, lives without her husband and sons, who have reached the stage of university education. The men in her family go into the Sahara for several months in a row. It is worthy noting that there is a real effort to achieve high educational standards, despite the harsh conditions. When the refugee centers were initially formed in Tinduf, the level of education was extremely low and illiteracy was widespread. But today, these camps boast one of the most successful educational systems in the African continent.

The rate of illiteracy has dropped to five percent. Moreover, to eradicate illiteracy, schools and centers have been established throughout the camps. A Polisario committee sends students of both genders to pursue their studies abroad. As a result of the long Spanish colonization, most Sahrawis are fluent in Spanish, which is their second language in school after Arabic. Very often, Spanish non-governmental organizations go to the camps and offer aid to the Sahrawis. Some organizations even sponsor organized summer camps for Sahrawi children in Spain or elsewhere in Europe. Cuba also offers aid to the Sahrawis, as many young Sahrawis have been to Cuba for training and educational trips.

Alia, a young Sahrawi woman in her early 30s, studied medicine in Cuba for twelve years. She returned to practice in the Sahara, despite the harsh conditions and scarcity of medical resources. “The medical equipment here is very rare. I brought this stethoscope with me from Cuba, for example. We practice in very difficult conditions. Look at the sphygmomanometer for instance; I also brought it with me

from Cuba. There is little we can get here as far as medical equipment and gear.” As she talked, Alia diagnosed a child at the hospital, which is really a set of rooms made of compacted mud and whose beds are no more than shabby mattresses laid out on the floor. “What the children suffer from most is malnutrition,” Alia says, as she looks sadly at a child who's barely three years old and is stretched out on the floor, as his mother gets his medication.

Nutrition is a great problem for the camps' residents; their food resources are very limited and often their scarce produce is mixed with the sand that blows at any time and stops at nothing. Sometimes even, that is all the Sahrawis can eat.

Even though the clashes have ceased, the Sahrawis still live with the belief that one day, war could resume and they could be displaced once again. After running away from Ayoon in 1975 when the Moroccan army went into the Sahara, Aziza lives with her family, her only certainty being that the future is unknown. “This life we live was forced upon us by war, and we have been here ever since our nation was divided among three states, Morocco, Mauritania, and Spain. We refuse to live as anything but free. We were forced to seek refuge in Algeria, which gave us this region. We have been forced to live in this harsh nature, amidst the sweltering heat and sand storms, with no clear future for either us or our children.”

As she stood before the mud house where she and her family live, the sky suddenly started to change and turned into a sandy, dusky color, erasing the line between the desert's sand the approaching sandstorm. In these weather conditions, there is no real refuge for the hundreds of families, for whom sand has become an integral part of their water, air, and food. Aziza, who is a fifty-year-old, compact woman, smiles when describing how she lives during these storms: “When the wind gets strong, it can destroy some of the houses, and we remain in our tent until it falls, and then, we wait for the storm to settle, and we start sowing and building a tent all over again. Such is our life, and this has become a natural reality to us.” Safia, Aziza's eldest daughter, has become used to life's harshness in the camps, and considers her life normal and, mostly, better than if she had to live in a region merged to Morocco, even if this would bring more comfort than the sad life in the camp.

The Sahrawi families live on the aid the Front regularly offers to all the refugees, which includes food, tents and clothing, but not money. The United Nations, certain governments, and non-governmental organizations also help.

While Aziza struggles to set up a new tent every time the sand blows away her family's tent, there are hundreds like her who wait for their fate to be determined; but so far, their hopes have regularly vanished into thin air and all that is left for Aziza is to wait, as waiting seems to be the only choice she has left.

Translated by Lynn Maalouf

Vermeer in Baghdad

From a *New York Times*
photo, July 16, 2003

Antonia Matthew



Picture Credit: Ayman Mroueh

Light comes through the closed window,
harsh desert light,
the small panes making patterns
on the bare whitewashed wall
behind a seated figure.

Desert light, not cool, luminous, North European light
which caught the yellow and blue dress of
Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window
as she held it in both her hands, absorbed;

or that which fell from a high window
on Woman with a Pearl Necklace
as she lifted the strand, looked
in the large mirror, smiling, pleased;

or, as wintry light illuminated the broad
forehead of the Milkmaid, who poured
with such attention a thin stream of milk
into an earthenware bowl.

This desert light is closest
to that in *A Girl Asleep*.
In her shiny, pleated, red dress
she rested her head on her hand,
elbow on a cluttered table;
the light from a half-closed door
just catching her face.

But *The Woman Sitting in a Chair*
wears black. Only her face, with dark
eyebrows, and her large strong hands,
a silver ring on one finger, are uncovered;
one hand is over her mouth
her eyes closed.

We know her story.
She is not sleeping.

Zakiya Abd, sitting alone
in this bare sunlit corner, is mother of Beyda
who has disappeared.

What does Zakiya see
behind those closed eyes?
She says, “Whether she's alive or dead,
I just want to find her.”
What words would pour out
if she hadn't pressed a hand across her mouth?

Losing Sense*

Fawwaz Traboulsi

Associate professor of History and Political Science,
Lebanese American University

The hand on her chest is not hers. It is the hand of a woman standing next to her.

She stretched out a hand to put it on her heart. Perhaps to take the pulse of pain...

The hand on her chest is not hers. It is the hand of a woman standing next to her. She stretched out a hand to put it on her chest to hide what was unveiled.

She looks death in the eye, unmindful of the photographers around her. The other is not unmindful. The photo must be decent.

And death has its own brand of decency.

The hand on her chest is not hers. It is the hand of a woman standing next to her. She stretched out a hand to her chest and wrapped the other around her. Perhaps to lead her gently inside the house, away from the photographers' eyes.

We do not know for certain.

All we know is that the hand with two rings is not hers.

But the face is hers.

In the West, they finally realized the atrocity of the tragedy when they saw this photo.

It reminded them of the Pieta: the Virgin Mary grieving over her crucified son.

Do not mock the West. That's the way they are over there. They have no truth save in the photo. And the photo does not arouse their feelings unless it is translated into their visual language.

Do not mock the West. For the image of Mary grieving over her crucified son and the photo of the Algerian woman weeping for her slaughtered son –

her husband or brother – says things that transcend this and that religion. They express apostasy or worship. It's all the same.

The photo taken by the AFP photographer does not resemble the image of Mary in icons and statues. It is the sigh of a wound wrapped in her mud-colored veil, years and years before the Christ up till the end of the twentieth century.

This is the photo of a wound.

A wound making no sense. We know from our Lebanese wounds that nonsense is the largest wound and that no sense is the hardest of massacres.

No sense.

"A European Troika." "Eradication movements." "Governmental and non-governmental militia." "The Responsibility of Islamic groups." "The Jargon of national sovereignty."

No sense.

Arab intellectuals will continue to condemn Arab intellectuals for failing to raise their voices higher over what is happening in Algeria.

What remains is that what is happening in Algeria makes no sense. We may find some sense in it later on. But for now, it makes no sense.

This face is the image of no sense.

This face of a wound is sobbing in silence or in howls: the silence of a wide-open mouth or the howl of silence. It's all the same. For it is no sense.

Raise the silence over what is happening in Algeria.

* Previously published in Arabic in Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Aqs AL-Sayr* (Against the Current: A Collection of Essays) Rayyad Al-Rayess Books, Beirut 2002.



Picture Credit: Agence France Press (AFP)

On Women and War

■ Myriam Sfeir

IWSAW Staffer

This article is based on an interview conducted with Dr. Adnan Houballah, a psychoanalyst, who assisted patients during the Lebanese civil war.

Houballah begins his statement by defining the meaning of civil war from a psychoanalytical point of view, namely, in Freudian terms. He maintains, "Freudian analysis stipulates the existence of two fathers, the actual father and the imagined/symbolic father. The latter is the one who punishes, forgives, and represents the head of the family. Hence, when civil wars erupt, the basic thing that happens is the death of the imagined/symbolic father or the head of the family." This, according to Houballah, leads to a break up and society is divided into two camps, those opposing the war and those supporting it.

Houballah adds by explaining that during a war hate is projected onto an enemy and is transformed from the inside to the outside. This preserves the relationship with the father where there is consensus about concepts such as unity, nationalism and protecting the symbolic leader who is the father. Houballah admits that during civil war this is not the case. Civil war ignites internal conflicts between father and son, who enjoy a

love/hate relationship, and creates a fraternal war. He explains: "When discussing civil war the love/hate relationship becomes personal and subjective. When civil war breaks out, the aggression is projected internally towards killing the father. Step by step all institutions, mostly headed by men, start crumbling – namely, the president, the army, the government, etc. and chaos prevails." He continues: "Unlike males the daughter/girl has a pure relationship with the father. All she expects from him is love. He represents the giver. He is not a competitor except in extreme cases of neurosis. Hence war is never sisterly but fraternal."

Houballah then discusses the repercussions of the Lebanese civil war. He holds: "The civil war in Lebanon took its toll on both men and women tremendously." He argues that when discussing that war one has to admit that it was fought and initiated by men. Given that power was, and still is, mostly in the hands of men, 99 per cent of the perpetrators of the war were males. Women were the receptors of the negative effects of war. Despite the fact that women were immersed in the national struggle, only a small number of them were active in warfare. They were more or less bystanders active in the realm of the family. Houballah asserts:

"Women were responsible for sustaining the family, a role that involved a lot of self-sacrifice and courage."

During the Lebanese war, Houballah maintains, women were highly insecure. They worried about the safety of their children and spouses, they feared being raped, they were anxious about the future and what it holds, and they spent sleepless nights questioning what had happened to their husbands and sons who were members of the militia. He admits: "Women's sole aim was to protect their children. They took protective measures to shield them from the war raging outside. Sometimes they took extreme precautions and that affected the children negatively. For example, mothers used to lock their children at home and forbid them from playing outside. This resulted in their having less space in which to play. Children, as a result, were affected negatively and they started suffering from phobias."

Women were put in a negative position as a result of the war. They were threatened by the war and lived in constant fear. Houballah admits: "Men who were present in the battle fields had their weapons and that offered them protection. Women, on the other hand, were left defenseless; they had no guns and felt threatened in all aspects of their existence." That, Houballah admits, made them more susceptible to psychological problems. Women realized that, due to the chaos, they were robbed of protection; hence, to overcome their anxieties, they took tranquilizers to calm themselves down.

According to Houballah women consumed large quantities of anti-depressants, sleeping pills, and alcohol. "After a while they became addicted to them." Houballah recounts: "During the war, tranquilizers were as available as bread. Many of my female patients consumed tranquilizers and sleeping pills as often as they drank water. Some of my patients used to take ten anti-depressant pills a day. It is well known that exceeding the prescribed dosage often leads to depression."

Men also had their anxieties. However, what worried them the most was being able to provide for their families. Houballah maintains: "I treated men for depression as well. Men worried about economic failure, given that providing for one's family is a male prerogative." Houballah then tries to explain the chaos that prevailed in war torn Lebanon: "A lot of ethical principles were shed by men in an attempt to uphold their image as the provider. Many men strived to earn money illegally to keep the cash flowing and satisfy their families' needs."

Houballah then discusses rape phobia among women: "Women feared being raped and this phobia often

accompanied them throughout the war years. Yet, it is important to note that in war and peace rape is a threat women never eliminate and often think about." He admits that throughout the war he only attended to two or three rape cases and indicates that, during the Lebanese civil war, women were not used as instruments of war and rapes rarely occurred. He maintains that there was a consensus, an undisclosed pact among all the factions that women would not be targeted. The pact was honored and rapes rarely occurred. Houballah explains: "Maybe this is because we are very conservative in nature. We Lebanese believe in the sanctity of the body and rape was forbidden, a red line that should not be crossed. Moreover, the war in Lebanon was a struggle for power not for ethnic cleansing."

Displacement also affected women tremendously and rendered them insecure. According to Houballah one's house symbolizes one's body. Hence, losing one's house and being displaced is similar to the act of rape. He asserts: "The home is a safe haven for women, it offers them security. Being displaced several times, fleeing war torn areas with children, fretting about the safety of loved ones rendered women panicky and stressed. This constant anxiety throughout the war, which was relatively a long period, created a sense of futility. Women longed for peace and with every glimpse of hope came disappointment.

Houballah explains that as a result of the war many of his patients opted to veil. "Many women sought refuge in the veil, it offered security and protection from danger, especially rape. Moreover, some women felt the need to contribute to the war by sacrificing themselves and covering their bodies. Houballah recounts that many of his female patients decided to wear the veil after a massacre, a death in the family, or because of a dream. He adds: "Some of my patients, from one session to the other, would shift 180 degrees from a supposedly 'modern' women to a 'veiled' one."

Yet, Houballah also attributes the somewhat 'liberal' demeanor of women to the war. According to him, "the war encouraged women to be religious, yet it also contributed to enhancing women's sexual freedom. It wiped out the values women were expected to uphold, namely chastity and virginity. The war weakened the hold fathers have on their daughters. By overthrowing the father figure and everything he represents, the war brought about sexual liberation. Houballah ends his conversation by emphasizing "in all wars, the ill-effects last long after the use of arms has subsided. Hence, the current corruption and chaos we are witnessing are all due to the remnants of the war."

The Sudanese Women's Advocacy Mission to New York and Washington DC (June 2-13, 2000)

■ Marie-Christine Aquarone

Adjunct professor at Rhode Island School of Design and at Rhode Island College

In June 2000, eight women from the war-torn country of Sudan traveled to the United States to present their message to the world. They wished to say that they were tired of the 45-year-old Sudanese civil war and they wanted to announce that they had formed a peace movement and were calling for an active role in the peace negotiations, to help end the war. Their discussions with United Nations officials and high-ranking officers of agencies and non-governmental organizations coincided with the Beijing +5 conference, a conference on women's rights convened by the UN General Assembly that was attended by more than 10,000 female delegates from 180 countries.

A Peace Movement Created by Women in Sudan

In creating their peace mission, the eight Sudanese women succeeded where so far the male political leaders have failed. Their peace movement is composed of 31 political, social, religious, and refugee organizations, from both the North and the South. As elected representatives of the different political and civil society organizations, these women have been meeting outside of Sudan since 1994.

"We have met 11 times. We cannot meet in Sudan. It has taken us a long time to reach this point. We have cohe-

sion and a common cause. Now we are ready to go out into the international world," said one of the women. During the international meetings that they have attended, they have worked on social, economic, and political empowerment issues in order to determine a common ground that cuts across the many divisions of Sudan's heterogeneous society.

The war has taken an extremely heavy toll on all the regions that these women represent. It has so far resulted in 2.9 million deaths, the result of both war and famine. According to the woman representing SPLM-New Sudan', northern Sudanese bombs hit civilian targets in the South such as market places, schools, hospitals, and churches.

The bombardments and famines have created a terrible situation that combines elements of war, apartheid, and ethnocide. Add to the mix disfigurements and mutilations due to the explosion of landmines and a return to the former practices of slavery. This slavery is reminiscent of the trafficking in humans by Northern Sudanese and Arab traders during the 19th century. The abduction of women and children is frequent, according to one of the Southern Sudanese women.

The statistics of this war are appalling: Aside from the deaths, it has caused the displacement of 4.5 million people. 250,000 people are disabled. Countless others are affected by trauma and disease. Eleven million people live in utterly impoverished conditions, and 2.5 million face serious food shortages.

The women are concerned by the war's disastrous effect on the country's economy and the environment. They note that three generations of children have now been deprived of education. As grassroots organizers, they predict the advent of two new famines, one in the Bahr el Ghazal region, the other in Darfur. The reasons for these anticipated famines are drought as well as inter-ethnic warfare and conflict that have prevented the planting of crops.

These eight women know that women and children are disproportionately affected by the war. Eighty percent of all war-related deaths in the past 17 years are believed to be unarmed civilians, mainly women and children. "The abduction of women and children is still going on," says the woman representing the SPLM. They suffer, more than men, from hunger, disease, and the lack of medical supplies. "We are more helpless without our men." In wars women suffer more physical abuse, work harder, and have more family responsibilities. They endure widowhood, emotional trauma, and stress. This is added to the usual constraints faced by African women and other women of the Third World: limited access to education, lack of schooling opportunities for girls, lack of skills and experience, and limited exposure to the outside world.

The war in the Sudan is unique not only for its length but because the country has known only war since its independence in 1956. Disorder and mutiny broke out even before independence, when the British officers of the Southern Eriteria Corps were replaced by northern Sudanese officers. A brief respite in the civil war lasted from 1972, the year of the Addis Ababa Agreement ending the hostilities between North and South, and 1983. But President Ja'far Nimeiri's introduction of the *Sharia* (Islamic Law) in 1983 led to a collapse of the agreement and to a mass exodus of students, civil servants, and organized forces. Over time, this created a huge flow of half a million refugees and four million internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Five of the eight women are from the South, a region long divided by inter-ethnic conflict and actively bombarded by the government. Warring factions in the South fight over water points and animal grazing rights, as part of longstanding tensions between agriculturalists and pastoral peoples. And yet, "we have learned to build our peace movement in the midst of war." As they work out

a common strategy to make their voices heard, they constantly bridge the gap between their cultures and religions. At the peace mission to the United Nations, the lady from Khartoum translated from English into Arabic for the lady from the Nuba Mountains, a region severely bombarded by the Sudanese government.

The UN officials were stunned by the women. "We have never seen this", said a high ranking officer. "We salute the solidarity of these women, who represent the collective voice of anger and determination." While these meetings unfolded in New York, two of the Sudanese women flew to Washington to receive an award from the National Peace Foundation.

Using the War to Further the Cause of Sudanese Women

Despite the heavy toll of the war, the message of these women is one of hope. They see "positive" aspects of the war, in that the war can help women shake off the traditions that have bound them. In Sudan, as in other parts of the world, women have not had the same educational, political, legal, or economic opportunities as men. The Beijing +5 conference on women provided insights for them into how women from other countries have tried to advance the cause of gender equality.

In their efforts to use the war to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, they will need to address the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting, as it is now called. It is applied in North Sudan but not in the South. It was made illegal in Sudan in 1947, but the war caused a step backwards in this area. Southern women living in the North who seek health care sometimes have to endure female genital cutting against their will. The lack of choice is a human rights issue.

While most of the world sees the conflict in Sudan in simplistic terms of North versus South, there are at least eight factions in Sudan. For various historical reasons the South is divided along ethnic, political, and religious lines. Nairobi, in neighboring Kenya, has refugee camps and numerous Southern Sudanese living in exile. Some make regular trips back to the field to maintain contact with the beleaguered region of their origin. In Nairobi, groups and associations of displaced Sudanese women help keep together the Sudanese community and seek to overcome the divisions. These women help each other financially and have initiated self-supporting economic activities. They send the most promising of the Sudanese students to university. They look out for each other in situations of domestic abuse, harassment, and violence. They provide assistance when there are hassles with the Kenyan police.

These groups have decided that, despite ethnic, religious, and political differences, it is in their interest to establish strength through their common fate. And while these groups use as many as eleven southern languages, thereby encouraging the vernacular expression of each ethnic group's identity, most southern Sudanese have in common the lingua franca known as "Juba Arabic". Arabic was imposed by the North upon the South for reasons of cultural domination, but was locally modified to produce a regional dialect. It is ironic that the language of the oppressor is now, along with English, the language of communication in the South.

In Nairobi these women in exile are creating the essence of the future Sudan. They see the diversity of the Sudan, with its multiple ethnicities, religions, and languages, as the Sudan's strength, one that has not been tapped yet. They seize the opportunity of each new international meeting to initiate a dialogue with other factions in the bitterly divided country. They keep adding new women's groups to their peace mission. They think of ways to represent the diversity of the Sudan in a future political structure.

In their talks with UN officials and agency directors in New York, they pondered how the UN system might bring development to crisis situations like the Sudan. The officials were challenged to find ways to bring help to the most neglected victims of the war. The women noted the lack of international legislation to protect the rights of internally-displaced women and children. Given that children are used as soldiers in this war, a convention was drafted protecting child-soldiers. It was submitted to the General Assembly in an attempt to prohibit children under eighteen from participating in any war effort.

Prompting these agencies to make development emergency-friendly was a key item on their agenda. As they put it, they cannot wait for peace and security to come to their country before addressing its development. Another item on their agenda was to draft specific proposals and request funds to help Sudanese women develop leadership skills. As they see it, women need to be trained in mediation and negotiation techniques. They wish to be mainstreamed into the peace negotiations.

Fully aware of the historic role they could play in ending the Sudanese conflict, they want to play a part in training civil society about civil rights and in creating a culture of peace that will reintegrate the fighting soldiers into society and will incorporate peace education into the future school curriculum. They want to help break the terrible momentum of war so as to destroy it as a "total system".

They know the importance of promoting the education of girls, fully aware that the returns are higher for girls than for boys. Having studied the role of women in other African countries in the midst of war and/or civil unrest, they want to carve a niche for themselves. They note that Eritrean women played a major role in the struggle for independence from Ethiopia, and yet were denied active participation in the new government after independence.

Several of these women's groups and political parties are now accessible via electronic mail. This allows for a speedy exchange of information and follow-through with the agencies and international organizations contacted in New York and Washington. It helps break down the isolation of these groups.

Pressure on the Sudanese Government from Outside

Lobbying these international agencies gave the women a sense of their power and helped them assess the various factors perpetuating the Sudanese civil war. Many of these factors are clearly external to the country—which is why the Sudanese women decided to travel to the United States. They wanted to petition the outside world, knowing this might put pressure on the Sudan's internal situation.

They pointed first to the longstanding silence surrounding the Sudanese civil war. This silence can be attributed in part to the world's lack of knowledge of, and interest in, marginalized Sudan. Few articles are written about this "forgotten" war, in comparison, say, to neighboring Congo, or to Sierra Leone and Liberia. The reasons for these differences in press coverage raise all kinds of ethical issues. Is one war more important than another? How many deaths in the Sudan are needed before the international community stops ignoring this war? "We are a forgotten people," said one of the Sudanese women.

The ways in which the outside world plays a direct role in perpetuating the conflict is in selling arms to both sides. These arms enter the country illegally. Also, foreign oil companies are exploiting oil around Bentiu. The oil proceeds help the Sudanese government finance its armed forces.

As these women seek a louder voice as world peace-makers, the conflict continues. Both Northerners and Southerners suffer in a country that has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world. Yet it is a country with economic potential. The Southern women in the peace mission said that "all the resources are in the South". One of these resources is land. This may help

explain why the government shifted administrative boundary between North and South to include more southern areas in the "North".

Their peace mission gave the Sudanese women an opportunity to identify the greatest obstacles to peace and to develop a strategy. Women are the ones who want change in the Sudan. "Men don't see what you see," said Felicia Ekejiuba, the senior official for Africa at UNIFEM, in New York.

Conclusion

Although the Sudan and its civil war continue to be marginalized by the rest of the world, the Sudanese women representing a coalition of grass roots organizations have broken out of their isolation. While the human and economic situation of the Sudan continues to deteriorate,

these women are on the cutting edge of an international movement that seeks to change the situation of women not only in the Sudan, but in the rest of Africa and the world.

Knowing the necessity of acting fast to stem Sudan's fall into a cycle of intensified poverty and famine, these women are ready to take on major leadership roles. Meanwhile, the male leaders have difficulty even meeting in the same room. Unable to protect civil populations for the past 45 years, these men now need to listen to the women. These women seem to have found it easier to talk to one another and to determine areas of common interest. They are more in contact with civil societies "in the field". They also have more at stake since they are the ones most responsible for the children.

End Notes

1. SPLM - New Sudan represents an area composed of Southern Sudan, Southern Kordofan, and Southern Blue Nile.
2. Sudan outnumbers the deaths in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, Burundi, Chechnya, Kosovo, Rwanda and Somalia combined.

The Arab World ... What About Masculinity?

International Leaders Prioritize Human Security at WLP Conference “Clash or Consensus”

■ Abby Jenkins, Megan Brown, and Sian MacAdam

More than 250 activists, academics, policy-makers, and organizational and religious leaders from over 20 countries gathered at Women’s Learning Partnership’s human security conference, “Clash or Consensus: Gender and Human Security in a Globalized World” on October 8-9, 2003, in Washington DC. Organized in collaboration with the Global Fund for Women, the conference provided a forum for women leaders and human security experts from the Global South— particularly from Muslim societies— to explore ways to discuss and define human security goals and challenges from a perspective that is people-centered.

While the concept of security has been traditionally concerned with the security of states and the shoring up borders, the notion of human security encompasses the social, political, economic, and cultural needs and rights of individuals and communities in our increasingly interconnected societies and provides a viable framework for achieving sustainable societal change. In six panel discussions, conference participants discussed challenges to achieving security for all and identified the conditions needed for citizens to live in safety, peace and dignity; exercise their fundamental right to health, education and well-being; exert the freedom to choose; and participate

fully in governance. The conference highlighted the ways global gender inequalities in public and private spheres continue to undermine the security of women around the world.

WLP President Mahnaz Afkhami delivered the opening statement, stressing the importance of addressing the “universality, indivisibility, and the global character of human security.” Afkhami discussed the need to build cultures of peace in a world where human relations are increasingly defined by violence. “In an atmosphere of escalating ethnic tensions and extremisms,” Afkhami stated, “international relations are increasingly defined in terms of clashes between cultures, religions, and civilizations. If we define disagreements in terms of our fundamental values, then clearly we nourish the roots of extremism. We need to begin to encourage a culture of reason, practicality, and consensus.”

Mary Robinson delivered the keynote address that served as a call to action for individuals and organizations worldwide who are working to implement human security. Ms. Robinson spoke about conflict and post-conflict situations such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, and Palestine and the particularly dire conditions they repre-

sent in terms of basic human security, particularly for women. She identified HIV/AIDS as a primary threat to human security, noting that women are the primary victims; yet they receive the least support at the communal, national, and international levels. As points of action to mitigate the gendered effects of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Robinson highlighted eliminating gender-based violence, fostering women’s economic independence, acknowledging women’s burden of care, and finally ensuring equal access to prevention and medical treatment. Robinson suggested that conference participants form a task force in order to generate innovative policy and programmatic recommendations for building human security around the world. She also spoke of the importance of holding governments accountable for re-defining human security and changing how they implement human security strategies.

The first session of the conference, entitled “Rethinking Security: Human Security and Human Rights,” focused on re-defining how individuals and organizations address human security and human rights in a globalized world. Kavita Ramdas, Chair of the session, spoke about women’s strength in building peace through compassionate activism rather than conflict. Noeleen Heyzer presented the opening statement in which she emphasized the need to examine human security from a gender perspective, particularly in relation to development and to conflict situations. She stated, “There is no security unless security stands on human rights and human development.” Jacqueline Pitanguy built on Heyzer’s points, focusing on the interconnections among gender, sustainable development, and human security. Madhavi Sunder addressed the relationship between religion and law within Muslim societies, highlighting the importance of empowering women to claim their legal rights within Islam. Charlotte Bunch identified the pervasiveness of violence against women as a major threat to human security. She spoke about the need to break down the culture of violence against women that exists around the world and emphasized the importance of building a culture of peace and respect in its place.

The second session, “Minimizing Threats to Human Security: Gender, Rights, and Religious Fundamentalisms” focused on revealing the commonalities between religious fundamentalisms. Session Chair Azar Nafisi opened the discussion by stressing that all religious fundamentalisms “delete, exclude, and cancel out,” confiscating women’s rights, human rights, and individual rights in the name of morality. Kathleen Peratis highlighted the main mechanism through which religious fundamentalisms gain power to cause widespread damage in a community, namely, secular state support, citing Israel— where Judaism is the majority religion and religious, state-sup-

ported courts have a monopoly on issues of personal status such as custody, marriage, and divorce— as an example. Azza Karam underlined the importance of including women of faith (who work actively for women’s issues within the context of their religion) in the global women’s movement, distinguishing them from extremists who use religion as a political tool to gain state power. Frances Kissling explained how the diversity of modern family structures, which no longer neatly reflect the paternal, hierarchical blueprint dominant in many religions, have provoked a backlash whereby religious power structures are working to reassert their influence in state affairs. In conclusion, religious fundamentalisms— particularly when backed by secular authority— pose a serious threat to human security, undermining individual rights, most especially those related to the status of women.

In the third session, “Caring for the Future: Development for Human Security,” panelists shared strategies on ways to ensure economic security and on how improved access to health, labor, and education can enable women to freely participate in the development of their communities and nations. Afaf Mafouz, who chaired the session, emphasized the importance of eliminating both economic and emotional poverty. “We cannot think of the future of human security,” she said, “without emphasizing human dignity for each boy, girl, woman, and man.” Zenebeworke Tadesse and Nadereh Chamlou focused on how social and cultural values have led to women’s oppression in the labor force. In her opening statement, Tadesse talked about the urgent need to re-conceptualize care work as valuable to all of society. In this informal economic sector, the bulk of care work conducted by women, primarily in the home, often goes unrecognized and unpaid. Nadereh Chamlou discussed how women in the Middle East/North Africa region continue to face limitations to their participation in the public sphere, hindering the overall economic growth and development in the region. Limited funding for health and education programs was also identified as a major limiting factor for achieving sustainable development. Attiya Inayatullah described how women’s reactions to the conditions of their health and reproductive rights continue to be a “silent scream” in regions where social conservatism and fundamentalisms prevail. Marian Wright Edelman advo-

There is no security unless security stands on human rights and human development.

cated for increasing resources and state support for social and educational programs for children in order to end child poverty.

The fourth session, entitled "Participatory Leadership and Democratic Governance," dealt with the ways in which participatory leadership and democratic governance impact the achievement of human security in countries around the world. As Chair of the session, Carl Gershman spoke about the need to empower people at the grassroots level in order to build effective democratic societies. In her opening statement Najma Heptulla addressed the relationship between political participation, democracy, and human security. She stated that gender parity and women's political participation should be the mandate of every democratic institution. Heptulla also spoke about the necessity of involving women in conflict-prevention discussions and conflict-resolution strategies. Mishka Mojabber Mourani focused her remarks on work being done at the grassroots level to challenge traditional, patriarchal leadership styles by empowering women and men through innovative leadership methodologies that are horizontal, participatory, and inclusive, using the Machreq/Maghreb Gender Linking Information Project and Women's Learning Partnership "Leading to Choices" workshop as a case study. Aruna Rao discussed the relationship between institutional change, women's citizenship, and human security. She stated that full citizenship involves women's right to participate in decision-making processes, which cannot be achieved without fundamental transformations of institutions. Kumi Naidoo spoke about the ongoing challenges to democracy around the world, in particular, elected officials'

lack of accountability to their constituents. He emphasized that citizens' freedom to participate fully in political processes is a primary component of building human security. Naidoo also discussed the importance of including men in conflict prevention, peace building, and democratic development.

"Recovering from Violent Conflict: Gender

and Post-conflict Reconstruction," the conference's fifth session, highlighted the importance of women's participation in peace processes both during and after conflict situations. Ambassador Swanee Hunt chaired the session and provided the opening statement, noting that women are a largely untapped resource in peace negotiations and

in conflict prevention. Amneh Badran explained that limitations imposed by curfews have led to soaring numbers of people living in poverty in Palestine. The once-vibrant Palestinian women's movement has declined as members have lost contact with one another and grassroots work has refocused on providing humanitarian aid, documenting human rights violations, and providing trauma counseling. Sakena Yacoobi, highlighting the importance of international long-term support for communities recovering from violent conflict, expressed concern that lack of infrastructure in Afghanistan threatens the positive short-term changes that have taken place for Afghan women seeking education and training. Zainab Bangura stressed that the high numbers of women-headed households resulting from conflict situations, as in Sierra Leone, have important economic repercussions and noted that post-conflict processes must incorporate women's perspectives in order "to support a sustained peace." The speakers concluded that working to eliminate poverty and facilitating access to basic services, increasing educational opportunities for women and girls, and including women in all stages of the peace process are essential components of a campaign to ensure human security.

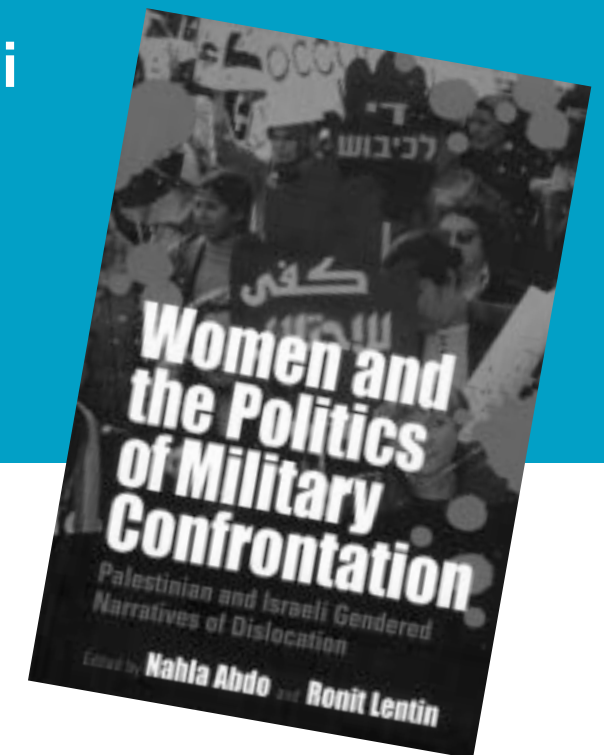
In the lively final roundtable session women leaders of national, regional, and international human rights organizations discussed "The Role of National and Transnational Organizations in Ensuring Human Security." Mahnaz Afkhami, the session's Chair, presented the context for the discussion, describing how international democracy and rights organizations are coming under fierce attack by many governments for carrying out work that is considered both subversive and disruptive. The fact remains that NGOs are becoming an increasingly visible and powerful force in world affairs. As head of the International Human Rights Law Group, Gay McDougall emphasized the importance of networks and alliances among human rights organizations and discussed how the Law Group is working to strengthen the capacity of organizations in the developing world. Indai Sajor of the Asian Center for Women's Human Rights provided a case study of how women's rights organizations in Asia have worked together to bring international attention to the issue of sexual slavery and the plight of comfort women during World War II. Asma Khader of Sisterhood is Global/Jordan and Kavita Ramdas of the Global Fund for Women discussed the necessity of listening to women's voices at the grassroots level to articulate their rights in their own words at the international level. While NGOs must not be expected to take on the functions that are the province of governments, they play an increasingly vital role in creating innovative programming, mobilizing for change, and pressuring governmental and international institutions to respond to the human security needs of the people in their communities.

We cannot think of the future of human security without emphasizing human dignity for each boy, girl, woman, and man.

Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation

Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin (eds.)
Berghahn Books, 2002

Reviewed by Valerie Morgan,
University of Ulster, UK



Writing by feminists seeking to understand and analyse women's experiences of conflict and the terrible suffering which accompanies it has become relatively common over the last ten or twenty years. They represent an important and increasingly valuable thread in the study of ethnic violence by forcing activists, policymakers and academics to take account of its gendered components. This collection, whilst clearly in this tradition, is unusual and, for a number of reasons, disturbing.

The underlying idea, to examine the many forms of loss, suffering and 'dislocation' experienced by women from Palestinian and Israeli backgrounds through a series of personal narratives, is clearly set out in the introduction provided by the two editors. But the complex layers and sub-texts of this seemingly simple undertaking surface at once in these first pages. The two editors represent the two traditions and their joint introduction is in the form of a dialogue conducted between December 1999 and May 2001. Inevitably, this struggles not only with the process of structuring and collating a book which draws on the common threads in the experiences of women from two traditions which frequently find dialogue almost impossible but also with the impact of the spiraling violence of the second, al-Aqsa, Intifada.

In a sense this dialogue lays all the problems bare and the

life stories themselves serve to elaborate and personalise the key issues. However, this is not to minimise their impact since it is hard to read the whole set of narratives without experiencing a deep sense of despair. Many of stories are harrowing and the relentless catalogue of suffering in narrative after narrative is likely to leave the reader drained. Maybe this is one of the effects the writers were seeking to produce, perhaps we do need to be forcibly and repeatedly reminded just how awful some of the effects of conflict are for individuals, families and communities.

To pick out individual contributions seems almost inappropriate, as though it implied a hierarchy of suffering. At the same time there are clear and fascinating generational differences in the narratives. The accounts provided by the older Palestinian women in particular stand out with their spare, gaunt presentation. The recollection of horrific events in plain, almost detached and seemingly unemotional, style is deeply moving. Many of the

Book Review

younger women provide valuable details of context and explain the wider background against which individual events occurred but their accounts do not always have the force of those narrated by their mothers and grandmothers. Since many of these younger contributors are writers and academics, it is not surprising that their political beliefs and theoretical understandings are interwoven with their personal accounts. This helps the reader to understand 'where the author is coming from', but just occasionally it also leaves a slight sense of the ideology dictating and shaping the story.

The most thought provoking aspect of the book, however, is linked to its basic structure. Although the editors go to considerable trouble to highlight the complexity of the relationship between the sufferings that women from Arab/Palestinian backgrounds have experienced since the establishment of the state of Israel and the suffering of those women from Jewish/Israeli communities during and since the Holocaust, the structure inevitably invites comparison. But the reality of what has happened in Israel and the Occupied Territories since 1947-8, and what is happening now, makes this almost impossible. The current imbalance of power between the two communities and the fact that one group has physically displaced the other, in many of the places they write about, colours the whole narrative. On the one hand, it makes it extremely difficult for the Arab/Palestinian women to empathise with Israeli concerns. On the other, the Jewish/Israeli women in spite of the fact that they hold liberal positions and express general distaste for aspects of current Israeli

government policies, find it extremely disturbing to acknowledge the full force of what actually happened to many Palestinian communities.

Perhaps one of the most telling accounts is Nira Yuval-Davis's painful recollection of the impact of discovering that the Palestinian she meets in London and begins a relationship with had - as a small child - been forced out of the fishing village which later became the idyllic location for her childhood family holidays. The problems which this imbalance creates could be cited as a weakness of the book but perhaps they are also part of a subtle sub-text through which the editors and authors invite us to look again at a seemingly intractable problem and consider what compromises and accommodations would have to be made to achieve any sort of stable future.

This is not an 'easy read' at any level but it is a book which should not be pigeonholed and perhaps ignored by many academics and policy makers with the argument that it is for women, feminists and liberals. It could be put on the required reading list for politicians and community leaders in divided societies everywhere. If they could really read with some semblance of an open mind it would not make their task simpler but it just might make a difference.

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