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**“THEY NEVER LEFT,  
THEY NEVER ARRIVED”\*:  
The Life and Work of Samia Bamieh  
of Palestine**

*\*quotation by Mahmoud Darwish*

**By Theresa de Langis, Peace Writer**

**Edited by Emiko Noma**



**2007 Women PeaceMakers Program**

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## **ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM**

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights – as generally there is no time, or, perhaps, no formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women – those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation – must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.<sup>1</sup>

**BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER —**  
**SAMIA BAMIEH**

Samia Bamieh is a founding member and respected leader of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC) and chairperson of its Palestinian Steering Committee. Bamieh, one of the experts who helped formulate the Palestinian government's Plan of Action on gender after the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, was the director of gender policies and training in the Palestinian Directorate of Gender and Development of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. She then served in the same ministry as director of U.N. and International Organizations and director general of European Affairs, and was a member of the committee assigned to draft a Palestinian constitution under Minister Nabeel Shaath.

Bamieh, a mother of two, has been involved for over 30 years in promoting women's rights and roles in politics and decision making. Her civil society activism includes being a member of Jerusalem Link, the coordinating body of two independent women's organizations (the Jerusalem Center for Women on the Palestinian side and the Jerusalem Women's Action Center on the Israeli side) that promote a shared set of political principles for coexistence and the resolution of the conflict. Bamieh continues to be engaged in efforts to build a civil, political society for a future Palestinian state on two interdependent fronts: the establishment of an independent democratic state with a constitution that acknowledges pluralism and non-discrimination, and the expansion and defense of achievements of Palestinian women in their political and legal struggles. In spite of having suffered from war, occupation and disappointing peace efforts, Bamieh has chosen to take paths that allow her to support and inform new ways of thinking about the conflict and how peace and communities might be restored.

### NOTE TO THE READER

When I accepted to share my narrative as a Woman PeaceMaker, I asked myself, “Where to begin?” The answer was not easy. My story started long before my birth and found its roots in the history of this land, of our region. This is the story which has determined my journey in life as well as those of my generation.

Palestinian I am, but how do you explain that when my state has not yet emerged or re-emerged on the map of the world? My whole life I was forced to make a long explanation to answer a simple question, “Where are you from?”

“From Palestine.”

“Where is that?”

And when I pointed to it on a map, my interlocutor would reply, “Ah, from Israel.”

“No, from Palestine.” And I started my long explanation to affirm my right in this land, my belonging to this land, its history, its civilization.

But my interlocutor was right. Palestine as a name has disappeared from the geographical maps since 1948. Those who want to understand my story have to understand the story of my land, although my journey is one of a Palestinian committed to a project of the future: the reconstruction of a Palestinian identity, of a Palestinian society in a free, sovereign, democratic Palestine. I belong to a generation that is part of the Palestinian national liberation movement, which has identified itself as part of the anti-colonialist, anti-racism movements in the world — part of the struggle and aspirations of people for freedom, independence and democracy, notably in the Arab region I belong to.

Without understanding the history of this land, you cannot understand the struggle I have been involved in for more than 30 years: rooted in the history but refusing to be captive to the past; strongly believing what the Dutch philosopher Spinoza stated, that “peace is not the absence of war,” and that achieving peace requires justice; looking forward to a future free from fear and want, where human rights and human dignity are respected.

This narrative will only touch on some important crossroads in the region which have affected, in one way or another, my path and my choices.

— *Samia Bamieh*

*Al-Nakba*<sup>2</sup>

I was born in May 1949, a year after the Nakba, which means in Arabic “the disaster” or “the catastrophe.” May is a beautiful month in our region — springtime, and everything seems joyful. Yet, my birthday month always brought sad memories to my parents, to Palestinians, reminding them of the time they first became refugees. Even today, 15th of May is a day to commemorate Nakba by Palestinians, wherever they are around the world. On the Israeli calendar, this is a day of celebration for the establishment of the state of Israel. For us, it is a time to remember the horror of that year and to reassert our right to return — *al-Awda*.

Thus begins Samia Bamieh, a Palestinian woman peacemaker from one of the most protracted conflicts of the modern world: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and consequent “Palestinian Question.” Samia understands the root of this question as a colonial Western enterprise which led to the establishment of the state of Israel, at the expense of the Palestinian population — the loss of land, the dislocation from home, the fragmentation of families, the dispossession of a people. This is what the Palestinians call al-Nakba.

Al-Nakba, as Samia explains, must be understood within the context of a culmination of decades of Palestinian resistance to colonial rule and the struggle for self-determination. With the fall of the Turkish Ottoman Empire at the close of World War I, the European powers secured colonial occupation of 85 percent of the world’s territory, including a large segment of what is now referred to as the Middle East. In the Sykes-Picot agreement, a secret understanding concluded in May 1916 between France and Great Britain, the two colonial powers divided the Ottoman Empire and held Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine under their respective hegemony, under the auspices of the League of Nations. The league instituted a mandate system over the former Ottoman provinces, whereby the territories were expected to become fully independent states over a period of time, with the mandate power supposedly providing administrative assistance and advice.<sup>3</sup>

Palestine, one of the many former Ottoman Arab provinces placed under the mandate of Great Britain, was the single exception. Instead of independence, the British mandate over Palestine had as a primary objective the implementation of the 1917 Balfour Declaration,<sup>4</sup> a project lobbied for by European Zionists since the 1880s. The declaration expressed the intention of the mandate power to establish in Palestine “a national home for the Jewish people,” with “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”<sup>5</sup>

After years of diplomatic appeals by the Arab Palestinians to the British authorities, a series of revolts culminated in the 1936 Palestinian Rebellion, demanding self-determination and expressing resistance to mass Jewish immigration.<sup>6</sup> The clashes, subdued at times by oppressive measures, continued over the years, with the British finally conceding it was unable to reconcile the competing interests it had helped to create: a “national home for the Jewish people” on the one hand, self-rule for Arab Palestinians on the other. In 1947, Great Britain turned the “Question of Palestine” over to the United Nations. In General Assembly Resolution 181, which passed on Nov. 29, 1947, a proposal by the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine was adopted, partitioning Palestine into two independent states: one Palestinian Arab (on 43 percent of the land) and the other Jewish (on 56 percent), with an internationalized Jerusalem.

The year was filled with military clashes between the Palestinians and Zionists, with entire Palestinian towns expelled, and some 400 villages destroyed, in what Israeli historians known as the “new historians” refer to as ethnic cleansing.<sup>7</sup> By May 14, 1948 — the final day of the British mandate — the Zionists declared the independent state of Israel. The following day, a coalition of Arab forces entered the conflict. By the end of the 1947-1948 war and the armistice agreements, Israel — expanding the territory allocated to it under the U.N. partition plan — occupied 78 percent of Palestine, including part of Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> The remaining 22 percent (the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip) fell under Jordanian rule and Egyptian administration, respectively. According to estimates, 80 percent of the indigenous Palestinian population was dispersed through forced flight and expulsion, becoming refugees.<sup>9</sup> Since their exodus in 1948, statelessness has dominated and shaped the lives of four generations of Palestinian refugees.

Al-Nakba.<sup>10</sup>

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Youseff and Najat Bamieh, Samia’s parents, were among those Palestinians forced to flee, escaping from the coastal town of Jaffa to Egypt. From Cairo, the Bamiehs traveled to Lebanon to be with Najat’s parents in Beirut for the birth of Samia, the third of their four children, thinking the stay would be temporary. But after the war, Jaffa became part of the state of Israel. Like most Palestinians, the Bamieh family lost all of its property during and after the war. For those forced to disperse, their land and real estate was confiscated under the Israeli “absentee property” law and allocated to Jewish immigrants. Samia notes, “Returning home, for Palestinian refugees was not an option, despite U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in 1948, calling for the return of refugees. Israel refused to implement it.”

When it was obvious return was not a possibility, the Bamieh family moved to Ramallah, a city in the West Bank, where Youseff’s family had re-assembled.

The Nakba is about losing the land, yes. But it is so much more. The suffering includes the dispossession of a home, the dispersion of the family. Like most Palestinian families, ours was an extended family. After finding their first country of refuge in the Nakba, Palestinians tried to gather again according to their links, familial or community. So there was a first escape to safety and then another move that brought the family and community back together again.

With the help of his brothers in Ramallah, Youssef attempted to revive his transportation business. The Bamieh household in Ramallah included Youseff and Najat with their four children (Samia’s younger sister was born in 1952), Youseff’s mother, his widowed sister and three of his brothers and their wives. “It was a big house, but there were so many people, you felt lost among them.”

After five years of trying to rebuild the family company with little success, Samia’s mother decided it was time to return with the children to Lebanon. “Father was traveling between Ramallah and Lebanon, trying to find a way to support the family. Mother wanted to provide some stability for her children. So, we left for Lebanon while father stayed behind and continued his travels in search of business.”

Samia was six years old when the family returned to Beirut. For the first time since before the Nakba, the family took a flat of their own.

It was a beautiful flat. But I remember the first question I asked my mother: ‘Are we staying here?’ This feeling that everything seems temporary began for me even at this young age. I think this feeling of the provisional is not only mine, but of many Palestinian refugees. You don’t feel settled, you don’t plan as though you are going to stay in one place for a lifetime. After a while this temporary situation becomes internalized. And for the Palestinian refugee, this temporary period is now 60 years long.

Samia quotes from her favorite poet, Mahmoud Darwish, calling him the “conscience of Palestine”: “They never left. They never arrived” — meaning for Samia that “we are held captive as Palestinians between the memory of the past, a provisional present and a future still to emerge, never losing the hope of return.”

Samia greatly admired her father, and his frequent absences for business during this time deeply affected her. She recalls a composition she wrote as a schoolgirl for Arabic class, about a fisherman who ventures to the ocean to bring home food for his children and income for the family. There is a big storm at sea and he doesn’t return. The wife and children stand vigil on the shore with a lantern, straining to see through the stormy night’s darkness. And finally, with the dawn, the father comes back, exhausted and weary.

For me, my father was this fisherman. He had fought the storm and he is coming back to his family. It was like that for me: We were expecting him, he was never there, and this storm for me is like his life, fighting against the Nakba to try and rebuild something he once had. I knew my father was absent because he was trying to make a good living for us, but at the same time I missed him. ... missing him, angry he is not there, admiring him for what he is trying to do.<sup>11</sup>

With father frequently traveling, Samia’s mother took up the responsibility of running the affairs of the family.

I understood later, when I worked in the refugee camps, that women in the Diaspora have played this role. They held the family together and coped with each situation to keep the family going while the husband is traveling for financial reasons, looking for work. Yes, my mother had to be very strong, and she was strict in her expectations of us, especially our education. At the end of her life, she took up again painting and playing the piano, which she stopped doing during our childhood because she had so many responsibilities. In general Palestinian women, even if they were in different social situations, were the cornerstone of the family.

Samia was raised in the diverse and cosmopolitan surroundings of Beirut, yet she was continually reminded by her parents of the family’s deep-rooted Palestinian identity. “My mother was always repeating the instruction: ‘Don’t forget you are Palestinian and that you are the daughter of whom you are (because my father was a very prominent figure in Palestine) and that you are a Muslim.’” At one point in her childhood, Samia began to refer to her father as the “absentee present”: “My mother was always saying, ‘Father would accept this, father would not accept that,’



when she was setting the rules for us.” When Samia was born, her father had hoped for a boy. “I think I had the challenge for years in my life to prove to my father that I was the same worth as a boy.” She also had to please her mother, and it could be difficult to please both parents at once.

I wanted to be strong for my father, but my mother thought I was too rebellious. I admired my father, I respected and loved my mother, and I did not want to disobey them. I loved Palestine and I wanted to live up to my father’s expectations, so I should be a good Palestinian as he understands it, a good woman as he understands it. But at the same time, I was frustrated and revolted in my adolescence against the restrictions on women, especially in the private sphere.<sup>12</sup>

The values of her parents would come to shape Samia’s identity. Respect for differences, at all levels, was stressed. “I was raised with an Islam of compassion; oblation to the poor; tolerance for all humans. Father always repeated, ‘You are not a true Muslim if you do not, as in the Koran, recognize Christianity and Judaism. These are also faith in God.’” Her parents were always ready to help others without calling attention to themselves. “My father was a self-made man, a rich and powerful man in Palestine, but he was very humble and compassionate. Later, when I worked in the refugee camps, I met people who wanted to be sure to tell me how he had helped them at one time or another.”

While Youseff Bamieh came from a conservative Arab family with agricultural roots, Samia’s mother came from an aristocratic family of well-educated enthusiasts of literature, music and the arts. Her family was descended from Abdel Kader al-Jazery, the famous Algerian hero chosen by the different tribes to head the struggle against French colonialism during the 19th century. Samia admired her mother’s ability to bridge relationships among the different classes of people, respecting cultures and traditions. “I always found it fascinating about my mother how she could manage many different kinds of relations, with aristocratic people, with the bourgeoisie, with the refugees.”

The circle of family friends also was diverse, with the Bamieh’s Ramadan fast broken with Palestinians and Lebanese, Muslims and Christians. “Mama Angel,” the Bamieh’s au pair loved as a member of the family, always insisted that “religion is not a barrier to love.” A Lebanese Christian, Mama Angel wore both a Crucifix and a Koran on her gold necklace. Twice she brought the Bamieh family for a visit to her town in the mountains, Beit Mery, and the memory of these trips is of great significance for Samia: “I remember we lit a candle in the church of St. John at these visits. Even today, when I pass a church I light a candle.”

The value of embracing other cultures and traditions was something Samia first learned at home, and it was reinforced by her formal schooling. At age six she entered the *College Protestant Francais*, the French Protestant College, the same all-girl institution her mother had attended as a girl. Samia spent the next 12 years with a small group of classmates made up of Lebanese, Europeans and Palestinians. Students were obligated to complete an arduous French curriculum; at the insistence of her mother, Samia also completed the optional Lebanese curriculum. A central part of the richness of the school for Samia was its cultural inclusion and diversity.

Each day, all the girls gathered and the headmaster would give the morning prayer. She would say, ‘I know we are from different religions here. I am going to make a Christian prayer, but everyone at the same time can make a small prayer of her own.’ So, she was making her rosary, and I was repeating one or two verses of the Koran.

The message she gave us is that we are all praying to God. And maybe we have different ways of praying, but let each one pray the way she knows how. This morning session is a strong memory for me.

All of this became part of Samia's identity as an Arab, and more specifically her identity as an Arab Palestinian. She says simply, "I grew up loving Palestine," explaining that in the Palestinian context of the Diaspora, the land is transmitted to children by their parents' memories. "I knew I was Palestinian through my parents' stories. The Jaffa period especially was there in the house. Mother, and Father also, telling us about their life in Jaffa. Yes, Palestine was there, in the house in Lebanon." Bedtime stories were about the family home, built by her father as a wedding present to Najat. "We had three photos only of the house, but my mother spoke in such detail, I felt I had a very clear picture of it. It was a beautiful house" — striking floor-to-ceiling, stained-glass windows, formal arches and decorative columns. Summer nights were spent on a central patio dominated by a fountain surrounded by mother's garden. "My mother would tell us how the jasmine climbed up the wall, its smell coming through the open windows into the house. She continued to plant jasmine wherever she was living, and I took over. I now plant jasmine wherever I am." Samia's mother would tell of how she was afraid of the sea in winter, the furious roar of its power so near to the house.

Like all Palestinians, Samia's father called Jaffa the "Pride of Palestine," dwarfing nearby Tel Aviv, then a small suburb, and Beirut for its cultural and economic activity. In these years, when the frontier was still open, a drive to Lebanon took barely an hour or so. "It is not true it was a land without a people," says Samia, referring to an early slogan of the Zionist immigration movement: "A land without a people for a people without a land."<sup>13</sup> "It was not an arid desert populated by nomads. It was cultivated; it was known for its industries and agriculture." The Bamieh family had large land holdings in orange groves, which fell to the management of Youseff after his father's death. The Jaffa orange back then was often referred to as the "Palestinian gift to the world."

My mother would tell us how in winter, sometimes they drank orange juice from my father's land more than they drank water. She would tell us about the smell of the land at the time the orange blossoms bloomed. She described it so carefully; I was smelling it myself.

Perhaps because of his frequent absences, Father's homecomings were always eventful, and he too had ways to keep Palestine alive for his children. "We would go by the coastal road at the precious moment when the flowers of the oranges were in bloom. He loved to take us at this time, all of us in the car with the windows wide open. And he would say, "This is the smell of Jaffa."

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I was 11 years old. A girl at school had said to me, 'Well, you deserve what you have, because you left your country.' I came home very upset and angry, and I demanded of my father, 'Why did you leave Palestine! Why did we leave Jaffa!'

Her father, always a peaceful man, tried to calm her emotions. "Go and put your things in your room and come back and we'll have a talk," he told her. He gathered the other children.

We were sitting there around him, listening. ‘You must know,’ he began, ‘you are rooted in the Palestinian land.’ And then he continued the story: ‘My family came to Palestine with the tribes of Islam from the Arab Peninsula, centuries and centuries ago.’<sup>14</sup> You belong to this land. Don’t let anyone ever tell you differently.’

And so the story began, her father trying his best to find a way to explain a complex history to his four children. “We fought to the last,” her father said, beginning his story not with the 1947-1948 war, but with the different Palestinian rebellions against colonialism and for freedom. After the British mandate in 1936 refused to establish a representative government for the Palestinians, and because of the growing number of Jewish emigrants, Jaffa was among the first cities to respond to the call for a general strike, with actions then taken up by cities and towns throughout the country. The 1936 strike was to last six months, but evolved into what became known as the Great Revolt, from 1936 to 1939. Although an established and prominent businessman, Samia’s father had rallied. He lived six months on horseback in the mountains, and even Samia’s mother was unaware of his whereabouts. Father loved his horse so much, he shot it rather than leaving it behind when the family escaped in 1948.<sup>15</sup>

The story unfolded over the years about the spring of 1948. The Bamiehs had waited in Jaffa until the last possible moment. Then, with Zionist military factions — the Haganah and the Irgun — surrounding and shelling the city extensively, the Bamiehs fled for their lives in late April of 1948, around 10 days before the Zionist forces took over the city. Jaffa surrendered on May 9, and the Zionist military factions entered the city on the 13th. By that time, the roads were closed and the only escape was by sea. People were frantically commandeering whatever vessels they could. Mothers separated from their children were jumping from the boats, drowning in the churning water. Boats capsized from the sheer weight of human bodies. The desperation was heightened by a reported massacre in early April in the village of Deir Yassin just outside of Jerusalem, despite an agreement of non-aggression between its mayor and the nearby Jewish settlement of Givat Shaul. Such massacres deeply affected the Palestinian community, fearful of rapes and other atrocities committed against women and children. The city was filled with an atmosphere of terror as people ran frantically, desperately for their lives, filling baby carriages and even bed sheets tied in bundles to salvage what they could.

With two small children (Samia’s older sister was born in 1945 and her brother in 1947), the Bamiehs hurriedly shut up the house with everything in it — furnishings, the grand piano, family heirlooms — thinking, like so many Palestinians, the exodus was temporary. Mother packed only enough for the family’s journey, a handful of the family photos and her jewelry. The jewels would be indispensable over the years, especially to fund the children’s education. The few photographs would become a treasured family storybook, lovingly narrated by the parents to their children about life in Jaffa, the pride of Palestine.

For 11-year-old Samia, life changed that day listening to her father tell his story. Her history now included having been expelled from a land to which her family had been tied for centuries. She belonged to a people whose yearning to return was a driving force of their identity. She felt compelled to rectify the account of the cruel girl at school, as she had the courage to do so.

I went back to see this girl. I said, ‘I don’t know who told you what you know, but my parents didn’t betray my country. This is what happened, and I hope you never

face a situation where you are forced to abandon your home.’ I was so happy to go back. I was eager for justice at any level, even at this age.

For Palestinians, the Nakba is about losing the land; but it is so much more. “I think the first message my father gave to me about the Nakba was on that day I returned home from school so angry. He said, ‘Don’t forget.’” Driven by this motivation, she will devote her life to redressing injustice at both the personal and national level, always with the aim of accomplishing peace with justice in a sovereign Palestinian state.

### “What is Palestine?”

I come from all this mixture. I grew up in a very diverse Lebanese society, attending a French school and being exposed through the curriculum to both French and Arabic culture. And then my parents, mother especially, always telling us, ‘Don’t forget who you are, and don’t forget you are Palestinian.’ But I wasn’t living in Palestine; I didn’t know the expectations. How to solve the problem of identity? Now I accept my multi-dimensional identity and find that this diversity is a source of enlightenment. But at the time, it was a dilemma. ‘I am Samia, daughter of Youssef Bamieh, from maternal ancestor Abdel Kader al-Jazaery, a Palestinian from Jaffa born in Lebanon.’ This is the formula I used as an adolescent to bring my contradictions together. I do not know how other Palestinians solved their problem of identity, but what is sure is that any Palestinian refugee introduces him or herself always by adding to his or her name the name of the town or village where he or she originally came from.

“What does it mean, Palestine?” As a child, Samia’s Palestinian identity often led to confusion and contradictions — to be a Palestinian, but to be living in Lebanon, the extended family itself dispersed throughout the world without even the possibility of a visit. She searched for answers, but her school textbooks were blank. “I was always looking in school books about the region for Palestine, asking ‘Where is Palestine?’” It was her father, finally, who taught his children how to draw a map of Palestine — for him, an outline of the British mandate. And it was her father who first told the story of the Nakba as experienced by the Bamiehs that day 11-year-old Samia angrily stormed into the house. But her question, “What does it mean, Palestine?” was not yet answered: The Nakba remained a personal tragedy about the loss of her father’s orange groves and mother’s beautiful house in Jaffa. In the coming years, and with her growing maturity, it will evolve into a national tragedy shared by the Palestinian people, living both in the territory after the 1947-1948 war and those dispersed throughout the globe in the Diaspora.

In 1964, Samia’s father moved to Gaza in a final attempt at resuscitating what was left of his old bus company, even with limited options. Her father, after long years of struggle and not succeeding in rebuilding the business or his status before the Nakba, had ended up lowering his expectations and ambitions. In their Diaspora, some Palestinians succeeded in rebuilding their wealth, while many failed.

Samia’s maternal grandfather had passed away, and mother and the children moved in with grandmother at Youssef’s departure. For Samia, the change was drastic: She had always had a distant relationship with her maternal grandparents, and their aristocratic background translated for the children into a rigid regime of decorum reflective of their social status. This was a far different household than that shared with her parents, filled with warmth and affection, laughter and conversation. Since his departure, her father was not able to visit, and mother was overloaded with the needs of the family and household. “I felt there was a break in the family. I remember this as a time of solitude and loneliness for me, as well as a time of defiance and rebellion.” The family was further fragmented in 1966, when news was received that Samia’s father had been hospitalized with a heart attack. Mother hurriedly departed with Samia’s youngest sister to Gaza, where they remained for the coming years.

Samia and her elder siblings stayed in Beirut with their grandmother to finish their schooling. By June of 1967, Samia was preparing to graduate high school. Then, on June 5, the Israeli-Arab War was launched; in less than a week, Israel had taken the Golan Heights from Syria and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and had occupied all of the remaining territory of Palestine. The war brought about a second exodus of Palestinians, estimated at half a million people.<sup>16</sup> Unable to make direct contact with their parents in Gaza, Samia and her siblings closely followed events through the news.

Though I had not lived through 1948, I had the feeling I was seeing it all now. Every day in the media there were awful images of masses of people crossing from the West Bank into Jordan: people fleeing, many of them clearly very poor, with their children and a few belongings, some burned from the napalm being used in the war. I thought for sure my parents were never coming back.

While living through this, Samia was studying for the final baccalaureate exams. “I thought to myself, I must succeed because having my diploma is the only tool I have now. All of us, my sister and brother, spent our days worrying, feeling our world was collapsing, our future disappearing.” Samia successfully passed her exams in June. And, finally, in late June the family received a letter through the Red Crescent from mother and father saying they were safe and that “we must take care of each other.” Father was not well enough to depart Gaza and mother did not want to leave him. Without a family reunification permit from the Israelis, there was no way for Samia and the other children to join them.

Now young adults, the three eldest Bamieh children took on the responsibility of forging their own futures. One of Samia’s teachers helped her get a job as an Arabic teacher at a French elementary school. Soon after, she moved into a girls’ hostel and enrolled in classes at the university.

Father, meanwhile, continued his attempts to bring the children to Gaza under a family reunification permit. Some 120,000 Palestinians applied for permits under this category; those who were not permitted to return were later called displaced persons, many of whom were refugees for the second time. Israel conducted an occupation census in the newly occupied territory immediately following the 1967 war. All those who were not in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) at the time of the census, and therefore not included on the population registry, lost their right to return. This included not only those who had fled for safety during the war, but also children who were away from home at university, family members who were working in the Gulf or in other Arab states, or people who had simply been outside of the country visiting family or vacationing.

We still suffer this residency formula today. We are not citizens or Palestinians in the Occupied Territory: We are considered as foreigners in our own country, and the residency permits depend upon the Israeli authority’s willingness. On a Palestinian ID you have: Name, Place of Birth, Religion and Area of Residency. It does not say citizenship. And the area of residency determines where you are allowed to stay or travel.<sup>17</sup>

Father was not able to obtain a family reunification permit, but he was eventually successful in securing a three-week visitor permit for his two daughters. This brief trip to Palestine was an important chapter in Samia’s search for identity, a determining factor in shaping her life, as she tried to answer, “What is Palestine?” and “Who are the Palestinians?” Her first real discovery of the land

and the effects of the Nakba in concrete terms, it was also her first exposure to the Israeli occupation after the 1967 war. “I had followed it in the news, but up to this point I had never witnessed its real face for myself.”

To enter the West Bank, one must first cross the bridge from Jordan. This bridge is called Allenby Bridge by the Israelis, King Hussein Bridge by the Jordanians, and al-Karameh Bridge by the Palestinian National Authority, in commemoration of the Battle of Al-Karameh.<sup>18</sup> At the time of her visit in the summer of 1969, the border entry was an open air structure. Samia remembers the crowd of people, both residents and visitors, standing in line under the hot sun, waiting for their turn for the humiliating inspection. The soldiers were speaking to each other in Hebrew and addressing the Palestinians in Hebrew, although they did not know the language. “It had a very unsettling effect because you did not know the language.” First, they searched the suitcases, the packed contents tussled about in disarray. Samia remembers when it was the turn of an old village woman. As the young Israeli soldier searched her bag, he plucked things out of her luggage, saying, “This is new, and this is new. . . . You need to pay taxes for these.”

The old woman appealed to him, “This is not for business. This is not for sale. It’s for my newly born grandson, and this is a gift for my son and his wife. I have no money to pay the taxes.”

The soldier insisted, “You must pay taxes and only then you can go.”

Finally, a man came out of the line and, taking money from his pocket, handed it to the village woman, telling her, “Stop appealing to him. Take this money and pay.”

It was my first time witnessing the solidarity of the Palestinians under occupation. The man, although a stranger, refused to have the old woman be humiliated in such a way. And it was the first of many lessons on this trip: Solidarity is an element of force when facing the occupiers.

By the time it was Samia’s turn for inspection, she was indignant. He spoke to her in Hebrew; she insisted he speak English. She opened her small suitcase and watched silently as the officer threw her clothes out onto the table. Pointing to the strewn clothing, he ordered: “Come on now, pick up your clothes and go!”

Samia responded, “You are the one who made this mess; you put my clothes away.”

He angrily replied, “Well, if you don’t do it, you will go there,” and pointed to an interrogation room.

A woman behind her in line offered Samia this advice, “Daughter, you don’t know them it seems. Take your clothes and go.” The second lesson for Samia: “You have to acknowledge the asymmetry of power and choose accordingly your way of resisting the occupier.”

By the time it was Samia’s turn for the body search she could barely contain her anger. A female officer ordered her to open her blouse, first in Hebrew and then, at Samia’s insistence, in English. Humiliated, Samia at first refused; even after yielding, she had to fight the urge to push the woman away from her body. When the officer asked her to remove her shoes, Samia challenged, “Why?”

“Just do it!” was the reply.

Removing her shoes, she said aloud in French (in revenge for the insistent use of Hebrew), “They are so powerful, and yet they are afraid of what we might carry in our shoes!” She was able, at least in this small way, to salvage her dignity by rising above the humiliating experience.<sup>19</sup>

Passing to the other side of the bridge, Samia’s infuriation melted into joy. There was her father. They had not seen each other since he had left for Gaza some five years earlier. “He had always been a huge man, but now he had lost his hair and was bowed over a bit with age. And he was astonished too. He left adolescent girls and now we were young women.”

As they drove to Gaza, father explained the history along the way, pointing out where the armistice had been signed, the contours of the Green Line, what villages had been expelled or emptied during the conflicts. Gazing around her, Samia tried to take it all in.

Without knowing the land, I felt I belonged to it. But I was always in exile: Here for the first time I was on the soil, here for the first time I am seeing with my own eyes Palestine. In many ways, it was not so different from Lebanon, the same coastal plane, the same mountains. I didn’t feel like I was in an entirely new place. I was pleased to notice that there were so many similarities and resemblances.

Entering Gaza was her first experience in a city crowded with Palestinians. “I was so happy, discovering we are not a ‘minority,’ we are a people! Today I think I would like to see Palestinian cities like other cities, with openness and a mixture of people, which is not possible with the current policy of closures and other restrictions on access. But then, I was so pleased to discover all these Palestinians in one city.” Alluding to historical Palestine as the bridge linking Asia and Africa, Samia wrote in her journal at the time: “Gaza was the entry point for many invaders; Gaza is my entry point into my country.”

Much smaller than Beirut, Gaza is the main city of the Gaza Strip, a narrow piece of land along the Mediterranean Coast between Israel and Egypt.<sup>20</sup> The city was populated at the time with beautiful old houses along with new construction. Her parents’ apartment was in one of the newer quarters, and mother was on the balcony with her youngest daughter awaiting their arrival. “It was a very emotional reunion. Mother looked tired, but she was so happy to have her children with her. ‘If only your brother was here,’ she said more than once.” Although in a new apartment in a different place, it was a homecoming for Samia: “Having my family together, I felt again a kind of security I had lost. I enjoyed again the small things of everyday life in a family that I missed so much.”

For the next three weeks, father filled the days with a carefully orchestrated itinerary meant to introduce his visiting daughters to the Palestine he knew in all its beauty and complexity — his legacy in a way. That first day, the family had lunch at a Gaza café overlooking the sea, a favorite place of father’s since back in the days when he would travel between Jaffa and Egypt for business. The family caught up over dishes of local fish, Samia’s father filling their plates even before they were emptied.

Meanwhile, the youngest of the Bamieh daughters told her older sisters about life in Gaza during the 1967 war. To the amazement of Samia, the stories were told with humor. Terrified for the



safety of his attractive young daughter, father insisted she rub her face with charcoal and put her long hair up. She was instructed to hide under the bed whenever it was suspected the house might be searched by Israeli soldiers. “To me, from the stories I had heard about the Nakba, I felt as though the fears experienced in 1948 were revived in 1967.”

The meal was a joyous one, however fleetingly. Later Samia wrote in her journal: “For a few moments, I am out of any trouble, breathing the smell of the sea, the family laughing around the table.” She knew this happiness would end when her three-week permit expired. It was a “mixed feeling of happiness and sadness. I was living in the moment, and at the same time I was living in advance the moment of separation, knowing I will lose this happiness soon. I think I have had these kinds of mixed feelings all my life — yet another experience of the provisional, which extends to cover all aspects of your life.”

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In Gaza, Samia was exposed to two faces of the city: life among Gaza’s sophisticated society, and life among the masses of refugees living in camps.

While the two groups experienced differing challenges, they both shared the situation of living under occupation. Her parents easily negotiated between both milieu. In the elite social circle, Samia visited beautiful old houses surrounded by orange groves. Her mother’s circle of well-educated women gathered weekly to discuss what charitable projects they would undertake. Mother was anxious and proud to introduce her two daughters at one of these meetings, making a fuss about how they should dress for the occasion.

Curfew in the city began at dusk, after which going out in the streets was forbidden and dangerous. Yet, in the apartment buildings, an open-door policy came into effect, neighbors visiting and taking tea from apartment to apartment. As darkness fell, the barking of the dogs was joined by the *tat-tat-tat* of gunfire. “The *fedaiyeen* [freedom fighters] are out tonight,” said one of the neighbors taking tea with Samia’s mother, referring to the still-fledgling resistance against the occupation. Samia was fascinated. “Tonight they are hidden. Tomorrow morning, you can look out the window and see them: Maybe it’s the teacher going to school, or the baker or the taxi driver,” Samia’s neighbor told her. The freedom fighters constituted an organic civil resistance among the people, operating underground as a necessary precaution against the asymmetry of power between their forces and the occupying authority. It was this decentralized covert strategy that made the *fedaiyeen* so difficult to crush.

During the trip, Samia also had the opportunity to visit one of the eight refugee camps in Gaza, where sometimes entire villages had settled in an attempt to mend the social fabric of Palestinian society torn asunder by the Nakba. A prominent leader at one of the camps had been the mayor of one of the villages surrounding Jaffa and was a good friend of Samia’s father. To honor Youseff, he invited the Bamieh family to have lunch at his home in the camp. For the occasion, mother instructed her daughters to dress the exact opposite from their outfits for the women’s brunch: put your hair up, trousers are better than a skirt, and no makeup. Mother herself wore a beautiful long Palestinian dress with embroidery and a white veil over her head. Samia was astonished: “Why the stark difference in instruction? I understood once we entered the camp.”

Close to the sea, the camp was called *Al-Shat* or *Shati*, the Beach Camp. In Samia's mind on the drive over she had joyful images of the sea, the sand and the sun. She was shocked and moved when they arrived at their destination.

I deeply felt a sense of the injustice against my people in this camp. First was the overcrowding: people of all ages, with small pathways not larger than a meter between tiny houses — if you can call them houses — with metal roofs, and children everywhere running in their flannels. I had never before seen such poverty: seven to eight people to a room and a half; mattresses piled up to be taken out at night for sleeping; a cooking area but no refrigerator; and then a common toilet, but I saw no shower or bathtub.

The family was received in the camp by father's friend and a beautiful woman dressed in a Palestinian embroidered dress. Though everyone entered the same door to the house, the men and women were split off into different rooms. Father and the men went into one room, and the women to another. The hostess introduced her three daughters. The eldest was two years older than Samia, already married with two children. The other was Samia's age and just finishing high school. She had hoped to go to Cairo for university, but the family had sent her brother and could no longer afford it. She was planning instead to attend a nearby nursing school.

Although our situations were so different, I felt we were sharing the same frustration as Palestinians. Before 1967, I had always dreamed of finishing high school and then traveling abroad to attend school for simultaneous translation or journalism. Like her, I had to make my expectations more realistic after the war, changing where I would attend school and getting a job to support myself. And my situation was much better than hers.

Meanwhile, Samia began to notice a constant flow of visitors in the other room, as men from throughout the camp came to welcome her father. "That day, I think I discovered the prominent place of respect my father had occupied throughout his life, and I felt proud. As a Palestinian, he had not only lost his assets with Jaffa, but also the society in which he recognized himself and that recognized him." The procession continued unabated throughout the visit. The warm hospitality and honored tribute to the Bamieh family was also reflected in the meal that was served. Although living on austere rations provided by UNRWA, their hosts had prepared a traditional Arabic feast laden with special ingredients usually reserved for weddings or to receive a distinguished guest: bread, rice, almonds and different kinds of meats with special sauces. Tea with fresh mint concluded the meal.

After lunch, mother asked their hostess about the beautiful embroidery of the cushions in the house and the dress she was wearing. The woman told them she was using her embroidery to help bring income to the family. She explained how the colors and designs of the embroidery change from village to village and according to the purpose of the dress — for wearing in the fields, or perhaps as one of the seven dresses worn during the traditional village marriage ceremony.<sup>21</sup>

She was telling us about life in her village: during planting time, marriage customs, the different songs and dances. As she was talking, it was as if the village was alive again. I remember her face, her eyes sparkling as she spoke. She finished by saying, 'I was happy to know these kinds of days. I am sorry my children didn't know them,

but I still believe they will go back to their village and they will experience it themselves, these traditions and customs.’ This woman’s simple speech struck me again, how much for each and every Palestinian refugee — whether my father with his orange groves or this woman with her small village — the past is the reality, the present is the provisionary and the future is to finally gain again what has been lost.

During this trip, the Nakba became for Samia not only a personal tragedy for her family, but a national tragedy for the entire Palestinian people. “I was realizing more and more, what does it mean to be Palestinian?” She was beginning to understand that the answer was multidimensional. Defending human rights, dignity and social justice became part of her struggle for national rights.

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Father planned a full day of excursions along the sea coast. The first stop would be the family house in Jaffa, the subject of so many treasured stories for Samia in her childhood. They arrived at the gate and, at father’s knock, a voice came over the wall, first in Hebrew and then in English, “What do you want?”

Father answered, “I am Youseff Bamieh. I used to live in this house. I have my children with me and I would like them to see the house.”

The voice beyond the wall responded furiously: “Go away or I will call the police!”

His face red with rage, father began banging on the gate, yelling in an English held hostage by his fury, repeating the phrase again and again, “This my house! This my home! Want children see!”

We were terrified he would have another heart attack, and we were all pleading, ‘Please, father, please, let’s go!’ I have never before or since seen my father so furious. Finally mother was able to say the right things to calm him. My memory was swept clean: I took away no image of the house, no recollection of where it was located. All I wanted was to get away from there as quickly as possible. I could not bear the thought of losing him right there to another heart attack. I remember telling him, ‘We promise, father, we will return.’

Mother suggested the family travel to a small café outside Jaffa that father had often visited for hummus and his water pipe. The owner was an old friend and the two men’s reunion was exuberant. As the family snacked on hummus, father overheard his friend speaking with a small Palestinian boy, his grandson, in Hebrew.

Father got upset. ‘Why are you talking to him in Hebrew? Speak his language! Talk Arabic!’ The old man answered, addressing my father with ‘Bey,’ a term of respect, ‘Youseff Bey, all life here — in school, in the market, everywhere — you have to speak Hebrew. This is the language now.’ Father replied, ‘Then you must teach him Arabic yourself!’

As they headed for Tel Aviv, father would not divulge the final destination for the day. Soon, they found themselves at an apartment with father ringing the bell. Again, a voice in Hebrew answered, and again, father introduced himself, “This is Youseff Bamieh.”

This time a joyful response: “Youseff Bey! Come! Come!”

The two old friends exchanged warm greetings and then father, with a playful formality, announced, “I present to you my daughters.” For the remainder of the visit the two men reminisced, sharing stories with the women.

I was puzzled. In the car, I asked, ‘How come you are so friendly with this man?’ I had in my mind the experience with the other Israeli at our house in Jaffa. And father said, ‘This is a very old friend, from before the Jewish immigrants came from the outside.’ Father wanted us to see all of this on our trip, I think: the refugees in Gaza, the experience of Jaffa, and his friend in Tel Aviv. It was all part of Palestine.

Samia had many questions for her father after this visit, which in some ways was an odyssey into the complexity of the Palestinian identity. “I realized the dimension of our dispersion as Palestinian.” The Palestinians in Jaffa were among the minority of Palestinians who had remained through the Nakba; estimated at 150,000 at the time, today they form 20 percent of the population of Israel. Many of these Palestinians were internally displaced during the conflicts and, although by law Israelis, were governed under military rule until 1966, and then were denied the right to return to their villages — a right they are still denied.<sup>22</sup> Then there were the refugees, both in the camps and, like her own parents, the educated classes from the Diaspora. Finally, there were those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, two separated territories although a single land. And those still in the Diaspora like herself.

I began to understand the challenges Palestinians faced because of this fragmentation. The dispersions of the Nakba meant also Palestinians living in these different spaces, living under different political systems, different cultural contexts and different economic situations.

Unifying Palestinians as a people under a national movement will be fundamental to Samia’s later political engagement. “Because of what I first began to realize on this trip, I will understand why the national movement was eager to create political unity as a people before we had even reclaimed the land. The slogan was, ‘We were pushed out of the geography map, but we will return on the political map of the world.’”

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Samia’s trip ended in Ramallah with a joyful reunion with members of the Bamieh family who still lived in the city. Their second day in this last stop of the trip, father sent his two daughters with a male cousin to Jerusalem to say a prayer at the Mosque of al-Aqsa and at the site of the Dome of the Rock. The Noble Sanctuary (*Al-haram Al-sharif*) is the third holiest place in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. The Dome of the Rock is where, according to the Koran, the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven with the angel Gabriel. Muslims first turned in prayer to Jerusalem before the later tradition of turning toward Mecca was established. For Muslims, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem is as holy as the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The visit to Jerusalem was very emotional for me. The whole of the Old City is surrounded by an ancient wall, with four open gates in the different directions of Palestine. As we walked through the city, my cousin explained that we were passing through the Armenian Quarter, from there to the Muslim Quarter, then to the Christian Quarter and from there you can go on into the Jewish Quarter. Nothing separated the quarters; you simply walk from one small street to the next. The human history of the city was stunning, with the diverse architecture and the different religions, all side by side with no separation. A small mosque sits next to a huge Byzantine church. The cobblestone streets were lined with small cafes, shops filled with traditional Palestinian crafts and markets that you could imagine had survived through the ages. It was amazing for me to see inside this old city all the varied expressions of spiritual identification and how they had co-existed through the history of this city.

The small group soon found itself at the gate of the Noble Sanctuary. Situated at the middle of the old city, three young Israeli soldiers were standing by their jeep. “Just keep walking and don’t stop,” the cousin advised the two sisters.

As they approached the large door of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, one of the soldiers stopped them, demanding, “Where are you going?”

Explaining they were on the way to Al-Aqsa, the soldier said, “It’s closed today.” They suspected this could not possibly be true, but the three also knew they could not argue. “I remember the look on my cousin’s face. He was maybe 15 years old, just a boy.”

An old man wearing a *keffiyeh* came toward them and asked, “What do you want, my children?”

Samia’s cousin answered, “We want to pray in Al-Aqsa and the soldier says it is closed.”

Raising his shoulders and with a look of dignity, the old man declared, “You enter. This is the house of God. It is never closed.” Emboldened by his remarks, the three entered, leaving behind the Israeli soldiers, laughing at their joke.

We entered, a scarf covering our heads, in our trousers, dressed modestly as is appropriate for prayer. Ahhh, it was so beautiful to see. There was the Dome of the Rock shining in the sun, surrounded by a courtyard. We made a prayer and entered the mosque to make another prayer. You felt truly you were in a sacred space.

The next day, Samia and her sister left Ramallah to return to Lebanon. Mother quietly took them aside. She did not criticize Samia for leaving grandmother’s house; rather she told her daughters, “The two of you should find a small apartment, and I will send your younger sister to finish her studies at the university. I want you to be together.” Father and his youngest daughter, who was hoping to leave with her sisters, came to the crossing to see the girls off. Stopping on the bridge for a final look at the family she was leaving behind, Samia said to herself, “I swear I am coming back, but not this way.”

Although a short visit, for the first time Palestine was something material for me, not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of the questions that had been with me throughout my life: “What is Palestine? Who are the Palestinians?” I saw the diversity of the refugee problem both in the camps and in Gaza society. I saw the dimension of our dispersion. I realized that I must learn to differentiate between those Israelis who are friendly and were part of our society and those who at the time I considered intruders. Palestine was no longer a memory of orange groves and the house of my father. It now became for me a concern with national and human dimensions.

For Samia, the Palestinian question, the catastrophe of the Nakba and her own Palestinian roots had finished being a childhood bedtime story based on her parents’ memories. And as the tragedy of the Nakba moved from the personal to the national, so too would her identity and destiny evolve to become intricately connected with the Palestinian national movement.

### Coming to Political Commitment

You grow up in a family where your father was a Palestinian who gave most of his youth and old age for freedom, against the British Mandate and then against the Zionist colonization. From your mother's side you have a prominent freedom fighter, Emir Abdel Kader al Jazaery. These were the roots of my history, which have shaped my identity.

Coming to maturity, the diversity of Samia's identity was at times a dilemma that prompted, as she says, "many questions in my mind and in my heart." As she grew older, this complexity became a source of richness. The diversity she had been exposed to through her education and social and religious surroundings led her to believe that the exchange of cultures is a powerful source of understanding between human beings. "I don't believe in the clash of civilizations. I believe that civilizations can give to each other, and whenever they give to each other they are becoming a new thing, a way forward for humanity." From this complexity she also gained strength, not only at the personal level but in her identity as a Palestinian.

After the 1967 war, the whole of the Palestinian territory was occupied. Crossing the bridge out of Palestine, Samia hoped to return again in freedom rather than as a visitor with a permit, "although it was not clear to me how at the time. From what I had heard about the fedaiyeen I was eager to learn more about this underground resistance." For her, the injustice of the occupation and the inhumane conditions she had seen at the refugee camps lent "legitimacy to their defiance as an act of rightfully reclaiming justice." Upon returning home, Samia and her sister moved into a studio apartment as their mother had instructed, and Samia continued teaching and attending university. "But I was preoccupied with finding out how I could link with the resistance, and finding information was difficult because they were an underground organization at the time." She attended some political lectures about the "Palestinian question" at her university. "I listened, but it didn't lead me to what I was searching for. Since I didn't know anyone in the refugee camps, I didn't know how to make this link."

Soon Samia's youngest sister arrived from Gaza and began looking for a job. After replying to an ad in the newspaper, she came home especially happy: She had been hired, but the more important news was that a Bamieh second cousin they didn't know ran the office, and she had invited him to come to the house to meet them all. Samia, protective of her independence from the family, replied, "Why did you tell him about us? So the family can interfere again in our lives?" A few days later, Saeb Bamieh arrived at the house, offering to be of assistance to the sisters in any way. What she first felt as a threat of interference in their lives ended up the feeling of a secure and supportive presence.

Saeb served as Samia's first important link to the resistance movement. "I asked if he knew about any of the organizations I heard about in Gaza, how I could find out more about them and how I could see the refugee camps in Lebanon." Saeb took Samia to a few different political meetings at the Shatilla refugee camp, which was close to where he lived with his parents in West Beirut. Although she did not make a decision on which party to support, she did have the opportunity to see what a refugee camp looked like in Lebanon.

I discovered that if we have some kind of unity as Palestinians, the refugee camps are examples of shared similarities. The Shatilla camp was as awful a place to live as the Beach Camp in Gaza, yes. There was no infrastructure. When it rained, you didn't know if you were walking in rainwater or sewage. Yet, with all the dispersion, there was unity in the camp. Most of the people were from the northern border and had gathered by community, by villages. There were poor services and shelter, but there was also the same generosity of heart as the Beach Camp. You couldn't pass by a house without someone saying, 'Please enter and join us.' Sharing what they had, they had taken with them the generosity of a village.

Samia had her first exposure to these things through Saeb, but he didn't try to influence her. She didn't even know which organization he was linked to because of the level of secrecy in the movement at that time in Beirut. "He would just tell me who was coming to speak, we would discuss after, but I very much respected that he didn't try to influence me."<sup>23</sup>

When mother arrived unexpectedly in February 1970, things quickly changed in what was still only a casual friendship between Saeb and Samia. After meeting Saeb, she asked Samia if he planned to propose. "I said, 'We haven't talked marriage, and I don't feel I want to marry now.'" Samia was 21 years old, Saeb 23. Mother didn't comment at the time, and she returned to Gaza. Within five months, she was back to stay, this time with father. "She convinced my father he can come and go as he pleases, but they must go to Beirut. *We have three young daughters at the age of marriage and already one of your daughters has affection for a cousin!*" The situation took another turn when father discovered that Saeb was the son of a cousin with whom he'd been in dispute since before the Nakba in Jaffa. "He was furious. And not being able to convince me to renounce this relation, he pressured me for a quick engagement, using a series of restrictions." The feud between the two fathers did not make things any easier. It was the women of both families (including Mama Angel) who rallied around the couple and intervened with their diplomacy. *We cannot separate these two.*

Samia's family had rented a house in the Lebanese mountains for the summer, and it was there the two families negotiated the terms of the marriage contract. As is Muslim tradition, only the elder men of the two families participated in the negotiations. Saeb was in the room but was not allowed to talk; Samia was listening from behind the door of a nearby room with the other women. Samia and Saeb, both fiercely independent, were humiliated to have no say in the process.

As the negotiations proceeded, Samia suddenly heard the sound of raised voices. The discussion had come to the groom's duty of providing the trousseau, jewelry and furnishings for the bride. "I knew Saeb could not afford all these things, and I have never been a woman interested in jewels or clothes. I turned to my mother, 'What is all this bargaining about?' I was getting angry." Samia had lost patience with what she considered nonsense.

I said to mother, 'Go and talk to father or I will open this door and do it myself. I don't want jewelry; I don't want furnishings; I don't want a trousseau. The ceremony will be the family and closest friends only. You know his family cannot afford all these things, and neither can Saeb.' He was the fifth child in a family of six brothers and a sister. His father also had lost all his assets in the Nakba. After high school, Saeb refused to follow his elder brothers to work in Saudi Arabia, and pursued his university studies instead, working in summers to pay his fees. He graduated with a B.A. in trade and management and started worked right afterward.



My mother knew I was stubborn enough to storm into the men's conversations. She entered the room, 'Youseff Bey, can you please come here a moment?' I said to him, 'Father, I will choose with Saeb what we can and cannot afford, where to live, how to furnish the apartment. I will not ask for any of these things in the contract.' I added finally, 'Father, I choose Saeb mainly because he resembles you. He is, like you, a self-made man. He has the same generosity of heart and is an optimist like you, despite the circumstances.'

After some discussion between us, he agreed. Nevertheless, father pointed out that I was renouncing what sharia has given me as a right, and that his only purpose was to guarantee my future. 'I will not always be present to protect you,' he said.<sup>24</sup>

Officially engaged in August, the couple was married Nov. 14, 1970. The wedding was a small gathering of family and close friends, including Mama Angel, followed by a four-day honeymoon. The couple took a small apartment with some simple furnishings on the other side of West Beirut and began their life together.

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Samia continued her search for a way to engage in the revolution, attending lectures and learning about the different platforms of the parties. She left university to devote herself full-time to the revolution. "I was not alone. Many of my generation did the same." Beirut in the early 1970s was a unique place for a student of Palestinian political movements. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) — created in 1964 at the First Arab Summit — soon evolved into a sophisticated coalition of the many Palestinian political factions, including Fatah, considered then, as now, "the people's movement."

On March 21, 1968, the Israeli army attacked Al-Karameh, a small village on the Jordanian frontier that served as a base for some fedaiyeen organizations. Fatah took the lead in the decision of the fedaiyeen organizations not to withdraw, but to face the Israeli forces. After suffering substantial losses in the confrontation, the Israelis were forced to retreat. Although not a wholesale victory for the fedaiyeen, which sustained its own serious losses, the battle proved the Israeli army was not invincible — the general belief after the devastating defeat of the Arab forces in the 1967 war. Al-Karameh was a watershed moment in the movement, and Fatah's central platform — popular armed struggle as the only way to liberate occupied Arab Palestine — gained massive popular backing. In the years to follow, huge numbers of Palestinians and Arabs joined the revolution.

Samia went to hear all of the main political organizations at the time, including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP). The Marxist/Leninist analysis that focused on class struggle had drawbacks for Samia: It excluded certain sectors from participating in the revolution and "did not apply to refugees and Diaspora society.

Fatah appealed to me because it included all the different sectors of Palestinian society, excluding only collaborators to the Israelis and those who had business with the imperialists. My father was a landlord and businessman; but as a refugee, even if

his status was different than those in the refugee camps, he had a commitment to Palestine and to the rights of all Palestinians.

Nevertheless, Samia did not yet commit to Fatah. Instead, in 1973, she joined the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). The GUPW had its origins in the women's charitable associations, both Muslim and Christian, in mandate Palestine. The associations, governed primarily by well-educated middle-class women, focused on providing social welfare services, mainly to women and children. They also played a role in the national struggle during the mandate period, when they organized demonstrations and wrote appeals, among other activities. After the Nakba, these associations were the first to take on the role of providing assistance in the refugee camps, even before the establishment of the humanitarian aid offices of the United Nations and other organizations. The Nakba also led, like so much of Palestinian society, to the fragmentation of these associations, as women began to create similar organizations in the countries where they settled in the Diaspora. In 1965, with the establishment of the PLO, the women's charitable organizations scattered throughout the Arab countries gathered in East Jerusalem to establish the GUPW. Like other unions of the time, the GUPW became part of the popular base of the PLO and established branches in different countries of the Diaspora, mainly those surrounding Palestine. The GUPW became the representative of Palestinian women everywhere.

Samia points out that the real expansion of women's roles in Palestinian society — since the mandate, in the Diaspora and with the establishment of the PLO — has always been linked to the national movement: As the national movement grew, the women's movement grew; as it regressed, the women's movement regressed. As of 1968, Fatah and the PFLP joined the Palestinian National Council (PNC, the Palestinian Parliament), followed by other organizations that had seats in the council. One year later, Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fatah, was elected chairman of the Executive Committee. Thus, the PLO leadership became formed by the leadership of Palestinian organizations, as was the case with the leadership of the different unions: those affiliated with the political factions moved into leadership positions. The GUPW is an apt example of this.

When Samia joined, the GUPW was on the cusp of transformation. By the 1970s, the different political groups had each established their own women's committees; these committees of young activist women joined the GUPW and helped to shape its future direction. While the branch of the GUPW in Lebanon still had a charitable approach when Samia joined, the younger members had begun to push for a focus on political work linked to women in the refugee camps, wanting to incorporate women into the national struggle while at the same time implementing empowerment and skills-building programs rather than charitable services. In the elections during the general conference of the Lebanon branch in 1973, the representatives of women's organizations linked to political factions took the leadership of the GUPW. The structure of the GUPW itself would be changed from a top-down leadership structure for charity work to grassroots representation from the women in the camps themselves.

Samia's first task with the GUPW was to assist in building the grassroots capacity of the organization within the refugee camps. With two other women, she began establishing a GUPW committee at the Sabra and Shatilla camps, going door to door when necessary to explain the GUPW. "We didn't impose programs or projects, but started listening to the women at the meetings and asking, 'What are your real needs? What do you think we can do together?'" Child immunizations, pregnancy and infant clinics, and child care were some of the first programs established. The next step was to organize the women. "We'd say, 'Well, if we are going to keep the

clinic, we need to have someone here.’ So, soon the women were running the clinic. We did the same with the other programs.” Eventually, the women were asked to elect their own leadership to take over the committee, a signal of their ownership in both the decision making and the implementation of programs.

The goal — and we were successful — was in three to six months to pass over the leadership of the committee to the women of the camp itself, continuing to support them with technical assistance so they can pursue the work. So, the GUPW was both responding to what the women in the camp identified as priority needs, as well as empowering them to become leaders in the committees to provide these services. I laugh now, because we didn’t have the word ‘empowerment’ back then, but that is what we were doing.

The successes were many. Young women in the camps were trained as pre-school teachers to meet the demand of the GUPW charge, “One kindergarten for every camp”; nurses and pharmacists were mobilized to volunteer at the health clinic, coordinated in partnership with the Palestinian Red Crescent; literacy classes were established, mostly attended by women in their thirties and forties, whose schooling had been disrupted by the Nakba. Soon, the GUPW was pushing for its members in the camp committees to be represented on the popular councils of the camp, which were responsible for managing the daily life in the camp. At the same time, the GUPW camp committees were electing representatives to attend the general conference of the GUPW where the organization’s leadership was in turn elected.

Samia herself moved quickly into a leadership role with the GUPW. When the Lebanon branch held its general conference in 1975, Samia was elected as a member of the executive committee for the Lebanon branch, part of the new activist leadership helping to change the programs and platform of the GUPW.

The GUPW was one of the strongest popular unions. Its general conferences brought together delegates from the different branches to elect its Executive Committee and define an action plan, and were also the forums where women developed and agreed on the political platform of the GUPW — a political platform which did not necessary duplicate the PLO position as in the 1974 general conference, which Samia attended as one of the Lebanon branch delegates. This conference was charged with discussion of the 10-Point Declaration of the PLO, released just months earlier. Expressing for the first time the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian authority on “any liberated part of the homeland,” the declaration later became the basis for the PLO to move toward a two-state solution. The debate throughout the many unions in the PLO at the time was highly critical, and the declaration was considered by many as an abdication of the objective to establish a democratic, secular state on the whole of Palestine, with equal status and rights for its citizens regardless of their religion. But the PLO needed the endorsement of the different unions.

Like many unions, the GUPW resisted, at first refusing to endorse the 10-Point program at its 1974 conference. The men in leadership of the political factions were always very interested in the GUPW conference, and the union was recognized as a powerful force in the national movement (although, Samia points out, this was not reflected in the leadership roles women played within the factions or the PLO).

Leaders from the PLO were there [at the conference] explaining the 10 points and the political context that made the declaration necessary. They were trying to sway the membership, saying it would be a mistake to have a big announcement that the GUPW didn't endorse the plan.

Despite the pressure, a front of women held their position to object to the plan. “We were demanding to be in decision-making roles and we were expressing our will to have our say and our view counted.” In the end, the GUPW leadership reached a compromise with the political leadership: the final statement was vague enough that it did not say GUPW endorsed the plan while at the same time not saying it was against it. “I remember many GUPW members were very angry at the women leadership because of the compromise.”

Nevertheless, despite some difficult compromises along the way, the GUPW always succeeded in having a common platform.

When I think back, I realize that women had a kind of force, because you couldn't find this kind of coalition in any of the other unions. The members in GUPW were aware of the necessity to form a common front as women. And even though we had difficult moments in the national movement, the GUPW never split. Women were working to find ways to compromise together, to reach consensus for the sake of their common struggle for women's rights.

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Soon after joining GUPW, Samia was invited by a newly elected member of the Lebanon executive branch, Jehan, to attend a lecture. Jehan was in charge of the Fatah women's organization, and her husband, Abu Omar, would be giving the lecture. A former professor at an American university, Abu Omar was deeply affected by the '67 war and left the United States to join the revolution like many professors and students at the time. He was one of Fatah's most effective spokespeople, especially on the role of women in the national movement, often linking the Palestinian situation with the Vietnamese liberation movement. “Although he was well educated and a professor, he had a very simple way of explaining world affairs and the political situation.” It was through Abu Omar that Samia decided to join Fatah.

At the first lecture she attended, Samia was impressed by his inclusive approach. He stressed the importance of a national front and how the liberation movement must engage the broadest spectrum of society, making specific reference to the Vietnamese experience. Samia attended a second lecture, this time about the impact of colonialism and imperialism.

I recall even now how he simplified the situation. He explained how our Nakba was linked to colonialism and how the imperialists divided our region according to their own interests. He gave examples I can still recall. Do you know why the Gulf area was divided into small countries, and why the UAE [United Arab Emirates] was created by seven emirates, and why part of Kuwait was taken from Iraq? Oil interests. If you divide the market, you can control the production and therefore can control the price. That's how the oil in our region, which should be a source of power for the people in the region, came to be in the hands of outside interests. I never liked dogmatic speeches filled with passion alone. Listening to him, I realized

this man was a leader who was appealing to our minds. He also impressed me by the principles he defended. He would say, ‘Our struggle is about freedom, democracy and social justice.’<sup>25</sup>

Samia was searching for a voice that addressed social justice issues while at the same time appealed to classes committed to a Palestinian national movement. “I didn’t believe that only the poor had an interest in the revolution. I saw my father, not poor, and how much he still hoped to regain Palestine. We were a national struggle and we needed the largest national coalition possible.” Samia was also drawn to the diversity in Fatah’s membership and leadership. While a common platform was adopted at the general conference of Fatah, there was the possibility of expressing different approaches and analyses. Membership and leadership ranged from those on the left and those on the right, the more militant and the more compromising.

I was always eager to have the capacity and the right to think, to argue. I was not interested in a dogmatic politics. In my opinion, this diversity was the force of Fatah, but also its vulnerability. As long as democracy was ruling inside Fatah through regular general conferences and elections, this diversity continued to be an element of strength. The lack of it would jeopardize Fatah unity.

In 1975, Samia joined the newly established Information Department of the PLO, serving as liaison to the media and helping to produce the official weekly newsletter in French for an international audience. Four people on the team were responsible from start to finish for the publication: collecting information, producing analytical articles of events on the ground, building distribution lists and serving as the editorial board. Samia was also responsible for arranging for French media to visit the camps, issuing press releases and whatever else might be needed related to the press. She worked there for a year before leaving to focus more fully on the work of the GUPW in the camps. “It was a good experience to better understand public opinion, especially outside our circles and in other countries, and how to talk with the West about our cause.”

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In 1974, the United Nations — for the first time — recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of Palestinians, which also signaled the reemergence of recognition for the Palestinian people as whole. Within the United Nations, the PLO gained the status of observer, providing entry to international conferences, often as part of the many liberation and independence movements at the time. The GUPW played an active role in this international exchange and became powerful messengers to the outside world of the Palestinian national movement.

The following year, Abu Omar asked Samia to represent Palestinian women at a political conference being held in Basel, Switzerland, and on a tour organized by different solidarity organizations throughout Switzerland. Her first time traveling to a Western country, the trip was a true adventure. “I was unsure I would be able to represent such an important cause, but as a rare Francophone in the movement, Abu Omar gave me the confidence to go.” At the different train stations along the way, perfect strangers were there to greet her. “I was told something like, ‘You’ll know him because he’ll have a flower in his hand.’ Or ‘someone who will be wearing a kaffiyeh.’ My first experience with trains was amusing because they do not wait even for one minute if you are not on time!”

The organizers felt there was not adequate security for Palestinians to operate openly in Europe, and Samia was already nervous because Basel was “where the first Zionist congress took place and the Zionist movement still had forces in that area. There was a large community of Jews there, so going to Basel was not an easy task for me.” Yet, once inside the conference, she was touched and emboldened by the warm welcome she received as a representative of the Palestinian people. That night, she was housed with a Jewish Swiss who was in support of the Palestinian struggle though his parents were Zionist. “He could receive me only because his parents were not home, and I can’t tell you the kind of night I spent! But it made an impression: talking to a Jewish Swiss in solidarity.” In Geneva, she met a woman who left a different impression. After hearing Samia speak, she commented: “But you are very calm!”

I was expressing our cause with conviction, but she was expecting me to be emotional, to cry, to scream. I was astonished by the question but later I discovered this is part of the stereotypical image, in some circles, of the Palestinian woman.

Her first direct exposure to the “Occident,” she was heartened to witness the solidarity of the West. “The grassroots solidarity movement defending freedom and human rights has always been an important and strong ally for the Palestinian struggle.”

Samia also had occasion to continue to travel internationally as part of the GUPW, which played an important role on the international scene presenting and defending the national rights of all Palestinians, men and women. The exchange of experiences they allowed also played an important part in the development of the vision and experience of the GUPW. The union had connections with women of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and other national liberation movements, and would analyze organizations for strategies on mobilizing women for a platform for change, especially in terms of working within the context of a national movement and operating within a conservative traditional society. The Sudanese Women’s Union, headed then by Fatima Ibrahim, had built a strong grassroots movement from a wide range of women advocating for change, but with respect to tradition and culture. “We were impressed. Fatima Ibrahim was one of the women leaders I was eager to meet, and I had occasion to do so at many different conferences when she was in exile.” The Algerian women’s movement also impressed the GUPW; like the Palestinian women’s movement, it was closely connected with the national movement.

Also during these years, the GUPW held one of the vice-chair positions of the International Democratic Women’s Federation, focusing on a platform of anti-colonialism and the democratic liberation of all people. The experience of serving as the union’s delegate to many international conferences also gave her first-hand knowledge of the global impact of colonialism beyond the territory of the Middle East. Attending a conference for women in Eritrea, Samia was introduced to a conflict for independence rooted in ethnic strife, leaving the population in ravages. The conference was held in the open air under the trees. The drinking water was unfiltered and gritty with sand. The women were attempting some agricultural projects, but the area was very arid.

I was stuck by the poverty and the thought that underdevelopment could reach levels we had not imagined. And I was struck by the power of the women in their determination to be part of the national struggle despite their difficult situation.

A few years later, Samia traveled to Ethiopia to assist with a literacy conference. The country was locked in war with Eritrea, so she witnessed more devastating poverty, this time in the country

of the occupiers. “I was outraged at the oppression suffered by the Ethiopian women. I carry an image of the women I saw, walking barefoot, so bowed down under the heavy weight of the firewood carried on the back, you cannot see their faces.” Samia came to understand that, in the midst of such underdevelopment, Ethiopia could not control Eritrea without the assistance of the powerful countries.

I realized that it is not only powerful nations that control other countries, but that undeveloped countries with the support of rich and powerful countries can play this role, too. Finally, Eritrea took its independence before Palestine, after the international community decided to make the difference and solve the conflict.

Samia also passed through Sudan to reach Eritrea, a unique exposure for her of yet another country in the Arab world with its own specificities. Yet, wherever she traveled around the world, the women were informed about the Palestinian national movement. “They knew about our struggle. They received us as sisters. Women everywhere, I concluded at this time, have a huge potential for power, and their oppression forms a natural link between them wherever they are.”

The GUPW was represented at all of the U.N. conferences during the World Decade for Women, 1975 to 1985, centered on the themes of equality, development and peace. Over the span of four world conferences, participants examined the status of women globally and the obstacles to attaining equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Samia attended the world conference in Copenhagen in 1980, which adopted the platform for action for the second half of the decade. The GUPW delegation was headed by poet and fiction writer May Sayigh, who held the post of secretary general of the GUPW.

When the delegation arrived at the Copenhagen conference, the international debate about the Palestinian question centered on the recently signed Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel. An agreement to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt (occupied by the Israelis since the 1967 war), the accord was sharply criticized by the Palestinians and the Arab nations. Although Palestinians were never consulted or represented during the negotiations, the accord presented the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian administration — with no reference to statehood, to ending the occupation or to self-determination — as the solution to the Palestinian question. The Arab countries criticized the agreement because it broke away from a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace in favor of a bilateral Egypt-Israeli agreement, weakening the Arab position at any eventual peace negotiations by taking Egypt out the equation.

The GUPW delegates arrived at Copenhagen, therefore, with the main objective of highlighting the fundamental right and ongoing struggle of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The language of self-determination was adopted in the final document, linked to one of the components of the conference dealing with peace.

The GUPW also participated in the nongovernmental organization (NGO) parallel forum held alongside the conference. Each GUPW delegate was assigned speaking tasks in one of the many tents organized around thematic areas. Samia was assigned to speak at the tent on “Women in Conflict.” Well-known Egyptian feminist, activist and physician Dr. Nawal El Saadawi was also a speaker in the tent. When Samia took the floor to speak, she began by going back to the roots of the problem, focusing on the experience of Palestinian women, especially refugees, ending her presentation by stressing the Palestinian objective “to regain our rights in our land.” Leaving the tent, Samia was stopped by a young woman. “I am Israeli,” she said. “It’s not true we have taken your land and that we are part of the Zionist movement that

wanted to uproot you. I was *born* in Israel.” Samia was surprised the woman had stopped her, but not as much as she was at the rest of the exchange.

‘And your parents are from where?’ I asked her. She named a Western country. I said forcefully, ‘My parents were living in Palestine, and because people like your parents came, you were born in Israel and I was born outside.’ It was an intense exchange and I didn’t want to continue, but she insisted, telling me how there were no people in Palestine when her parents arrived, about how they made the desert bloom, etc. It shocked me: This young woman believed every word she was saying. I realized then how much the denial of history had been transmitted to the new generation of Israelis through their education so that they do not know the real facts of the land. Palestinians had disappeared not only from the soil, but also from history.

For Samia and the rest of the GUPW delegates, the Copenhagen conference was an attempt to secure recognition of Palestinian rights; yet, in this interchange, she was faced with the “denial of our rights, our history, our existence. This has been a constant struggle in my life as a Palestinian both personally and nationally: fighting for recognition.”

Security measures were strict, as the authorities in Copenhagen were very concerned about the safety of the Palestinian delegation and potential attacks. Although the GUPW delegation was not able to see a lot of the city itself, the women were satisfied that, as women, the national right for self-determination was included in the outcome documents. In addition, it expressed the necessity of intensifying the solidarity with women struggling against colonization and apartheid, and for national independence. It was important also to be exposed to the many challenges faced by women throughout the world. “Even with all this diversity, we all expressed — as women — an eagerness for our equality to be recognized and a sense of solidarity with those women struggling for freedom.” Leaving Copenhagen, Samia added a new international dimension to her political activism, knowing now that Palestinians were not isolated from the world women’s movement.



**A Second Nakba:**  
**The Lebanese Civil War and the 1982 Israeli Invasion**

The Civil War in Lebanon is sometimes represented as a Palestinian-Lebanese conflict, sometimes a Muslim-Christian conflict. I think it is more complicated. I think the identity of Lebanon was at stake, and the nature of that identity. On one side were the different Christian parties, the major one being the Phalangists, who wanted Lebanon to be neutral to its Arab surroundings and in the Arab-Israeli conflict (they liked to say, ‘the Switzerland of the Arab world’). They had an interest in keeping the ‘status quo’ of the political system that was established by the French mandate, which divided the power between the different religious concerns: The president was a Christian and the prime minister was a Sunni Muslim.

On the other side were the Progressive party and the Arab Nationalist parties. They wanted Lebanon to view itself as part of the Arab world and not be neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict. With the presence of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon, the Progressive and Arab Nationalist forces formed a natural alliance with the PLO. The Phalangists felt this threatened their vision of a neutral Lebanon and threatened the balance of power. The Phalangists were threatened especially by the growth of a Lebanese-Palestinian resistance in the south, launching operations on the frontier and Israel retaliating, so Lebanon was being brought into the Arab-Israeli conflict. Regional and international factors also played a role.

The Civil War was really a multidimensional conflict, and during these years, beginning in 1975 and the massacre of Tel al-Zaatar camp, Lebanon was engulfed in different kinds of battles. When the Civil War broke out, the capital was divided in two — and when I say divided, I mean sometimes the militias were fighting from one street to the other in neighborhoods. In the south there was another battle going on: The Israeli army invaded southern Lebanon in 1978, and with Saad Hadad — a leader of one of the Christian militias — was fighting a coalition of forces made up of the PLO, the Progressives and the Nationalists. Syrian intervention, endorsed by the Arab League, was expected to calm the situation, but it ended up fueling the conflict because of Syria’s ambiguous role of sometimes playing a mediating force and sometimes taking sides, with a main objective unfolded during the crisis to control Lebanon. So, there was a battle at the frontier and a battle inside the country, and the country was devastated, with missing people, and the wounded, and high death tolls on all sides.

Everybody was mobilized around humanitarian assistance, including the General Union. Shelling of the camps had become routine and

the PLO established shelters. The General Union worked with the women in the camps to take charge of the shelters, helping them make sure they were always supplied with provisions, and training them on how to deal with the fears of women and children in the shelters during bombardments. The General Union established first-aid and evacuation procedures, identifying doctors and nurses in the area, and giving first-aid training to women in the camps so they could take care of smaller wounds because the hospitals were so crowded. The General Union also trained young women on how to use Morse code, which is the only way the PLO could have direct contact with camp leadership when access was blocked. Some of the political factions were giving military training to the women on how to defend the camp if needed. So women were mobilized during the Civil War and Israeli invasion.

A major activity of the women during this time was helping refugees displaced yet again. A horrible tragedy was the massacre at Tel al-Zaatar (“the hill of the thyme” in Arabic), a large refugee camp in Christian-controlled East Beirut. The camp had some 20,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1947-1948 wars. In April, two smaller camps in East Beirut were suddenly evacuated by armed Phalangists; when they tried to evacuate Tel al-Zaatar, the population of the camp resisted. The siege lasted from April to August of 1976, with the water shut off and the camp running out of food, supplies and munitions. When the camp finally surrendered, the men fled to the mountains and the rest of the population was evacuated, looking like skin and bones. The women and children were herded into trucks; the adolescent boys and old men still in the camp were arrested and we never heard from them again. We mobilized as women in the Sabra and Shatilla camps to receive those women and children evacuated to the camps, to find shelter and provisions for them and to provide them with moral support because of the trauma they had been through.

In 1981, I made the decision with Saeb after 10 years of marriage to have a child. We were so involved in the movement, and I always said I would not become a mother until I was ready to make the necessary sacrifices to my work for the child. I would like to find an answer as to why people decide to have children during wartime. The only answer I can find is that human beings have a desire to live, to survive and defy death in one way or another. During my pregnancy I didn't stop working, and I was running from one place to another, one shelter to another, war all around us. But this time, for the first time in my experience, I started to feel fear. I was afraid to lose this pregnancy. When Rana was born, she was precious not only to me and our family, but also our friends — many of whom, both men and women, came to the hospital to wait with my husband for the delivery the night she was born. She became the child of everybody.

Rana was five months old when the Israeli army began a full-fledged attack to finally finish what the Lebanese Civil War had not finished: the presence of the PLO in Lebanon, and with it the program of the Progressive and National forces. The Arab regime also had an interest in seeing the conflict come to an end. They were fighting a classical war, losing rather than gaining territory, while Israel could not defeat the popular resistance of the PLO and coalition forces. It was embarrassing for the Arab regimes, and it was a threat in their own countries of the potential of popular resistance.

In 1982, Israel invaded the resistance in the south, both the Lebanese and the Palestinian, using the supremacy of their air power to inflict mass destruction. In a week's time they had reached and besieged West Beirut, the first time they had ever occupied an Arab capital. The siege lasted 80 days, and it is now part of established history that they invaded in collaboration with the Phalangists, that the original Israeli plan was to enlarge their presence in the south, and that [Ariel] Sharon, defense minister at the time, decided to continue until Beirut. The routes to the south were cut off, by air and by land, by Israelis and by Phalangists.

Everyone was preparing the shelters, setting up generators for water and light, stockpiling food, supplies, medicine. Vegetables were selling for high prices on the black market. The bombs first hit Beirut in the area of Fakhaini, where Saeb and I lived and worked. The main offices of the PLO were located there, and the Shatilla and Sabra camps were not far away. Saeb and I were at our offices, and Rana was at home being cared for by his aunt. The first bombardment was huge, and everyone began yelling, 'To the shelter! To the shelter!' But my thought was, *I have to reach Rana.*

I was running in the middle of the street with the planes above me, people shouting at me to get to a shelter, but I had only one thought in mind, to reach Rana, yelling her name until I got to our apartment building. There was no shelter in the building so all the tenants were crowded in the lobby area. When I did not see our aunt, I asked the concierge. He said my aunt had refused to come down. I ran up the five flights of stairs like a madwoman. I found our aunt with Rana huddled near a door in the corridor, away from the windows. 'What are you doing here!?' She was afraid and didn't know what to do. I said 'Go down! Go down!'

I took Rana in my arms. Since Rana's birth, I had always kept a box by the door with all our passports, milk and some bottles, medicines for stomach aches or whatever, pampers, her baby chair, anything I could think of we might need for her. I grabbed the box and went down to the lobby. The people were panicking; no one knew what to

do. The bombardment was not subsiding, and the shelling was continuous. Then it stopped for maybe 15 or 20 minutes — I don't recall time, it was all too short, all too long — and Saeb arrived in a car with a friend. He yelled, 'Get in! Get in!' And I got in with no discussion. 'We have to go to your mother's house,' he told me. My mother's house was on the other side of the city, far away from Fakhaini. 'We don't have time! They will return!' I said. But we had no choice. We sped down the street as fast as we could, and Saeb was right. As we arrived at my mother's house, the airplane's heavy bombardments renewed.

We stayed with my mother during the siege of Beirut. The PLO offices reopened in a new location and Saeb, who worked with the PLO on economic enterprise, went to work. I stayed at home with Rana. Sometimes I managed to go out for just a few hours to visit the women of the General Union where they were working. The main task at the time was to help in the hospitals or the basements converted to hospitals, as nurses' aides, keeping those patients company who did not have family nearby. I did go to the hospital one day to help, but I couldn't continue. There were so many wounded, with heavy injuries just lying there dying. You could do nothing. There are two things I knew about myself: I cannot kill and I can't tolerate hospitals.

During the siege and battles, many students studying abroad came back through difficult routes to participate in the defense of the revolution. I remember one young man, who had left for school in Europe, phoning me. I asked him, 'Where are you calling from? From here? What are you doing, why are you back?' He said, 'Do you think I would give you the honor to die without me?' Comrades were saying goodbye to each other and joining the armed struggle. One of my friends called to say goodbye before joining the militia: 'Don't go.' I said, 'Do you want me to hide? I die to defend the revolution.' We didn't hear from him again. These are just two examples of what the PLO represented for the people: to reemerge, if not as a nation, then at least politically. The PLO was a state without a land, and at this moment it represented a unifying body of all Palestinians after all the dispersion and fragmentation.

I was helping my mother in the house: so many people there, it was too much for her. There was my brother and his four children, my father and mother, me and Saeb, and Rana. My mother and I managed all the needs of the family. There was a shortage of drinking water after the main water to the tap was cut. We organized water rations. Saeb, my brother, and the two nephews went to the wells with generators, where each person had a maximum of one gallon of water. In the house, we set up instructions for how to use the water: water for drinking, water used for washing, then used for the toilets.

There were no baths, so we explained to the children how to wash their bodies using as little water as possible. We were careful with the provisions available for cooking. Electricity at one time was cut.

My mother lived by American University where there was not direct shelling at first. Most of the shelling was happening on the other side of West Beirut, heavily populated areas, where the PLO offices and the camps were located. But then the bombardments started to come from the warships off the coast as well as by air. One time we discovered the Israelis had used a special bomb where the whole building simply collapses like a cartoon. So there was no use going downstairs to the lobby since the building would fall on top of us. And the street was not safe. We chose a place in the apartment that was away from the windows and at least a wall between us and the balcony. The bombings were hardest at night when we had to wake up the children. I think, as a baby, Rana could feel the tension inside of me and all around her, and she was crying almost all the time. Most of the time I held her in my arms wherever I went in the apartment because it was the only way I felt I could protect her.

Sharon was in East Beirut, the Christian-controlled area, supervising the operations. Finally an American emissary, Philip Habib, came to the area. The intervention of the Americans was to set the conditions for an evacuation of the PLO. Sharon said he would accept a ceasefire if the PLO left unarmed and under the flag of the International Red Cross. Yasir Arafat [Chairman of the PLO] refused. He insisted the PLO military and civilian cadre leave in their uniforms carrying their rifles. Arafat also wanted a guarantee that an international force would provide protection after the evacuation against attacks by Israelis and Phalangists on the population of West Beirut and the refugee camps. Under the terms of the evacuation, the PLO would be forced to disperse among five countries of destination: Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen and Syria. In the end, we all felt the American intervention was to get done by diplomacy the very objective the Israeli military operation had been unable to accomplish: the destruction of the PLO. By scattering the PLO over five or six countries, far removed from the Israeli frontier, it was fragmenting its forces, its institutions and its proximity to the land.

When negotiations were getting serious, we knew about them before it became public. We knew that ships would arrive and that lists of PLO would be given to Habib for those leaving. We also knew that no women or children would be included on the lists — only military and civilian cadres. Father decided the women should leave immediately with the nieces; the nephews will stay with the men because they will be killed on the road if they go with the women. I said, 'I am not leaving.' Father intervened. With all his history, he said, 'The Israelis will not respect their word. They will enter West

Beirut. They will perpetrate massacres. If you don't leave, you are putting at risk your husband's life because if he is scheduled to evacuate, he will not go if you are still here with Rana. And mother will not be able to go alone with your two nieces. You must leave if you fear for the lives of your mother, your daughter, your husband, your brother and his children.' It was one of the very difficult moments of my life. I wrote a letter to my comrades, men and women, explaining why I was leaving, asking them to forgive me for this choice. I felt I was betraying those who were staying. My father ended up being right: everything he said would happen did happen.

Father really took control of the situation. He took charge of the arrangements for our departure. Mother, the two nieces, me and Rana would travel to Syria and then to Cyprus, and we would wait there. My mother dealt with the situation with a level head, almost a cold brain. Father contacted his Christian Lebanese friend for our safe passage and mother contacted a Lebanese packing company. She started packing her most valuable things for storage. Father was furious: 'What are you doing!' She told him, 'I could not take any of my things from Jaffa and I have lost them all to Jewish immigrants; at least now they are packed, and if we are not coming back, they can be shipped.' Before leaving, she left boxes with different friends for safekeeping. She made a list of where everything was stored and kept one copy for herself and gave another copy to father. Saeb went to our apartment in Fakhaini to salvage what he could. I hadn't been there since the day we had fled. When he came he told us the living room and dining room were now one room, and there was a big hole into the neighbor's apartment where my library had been. He said, 'Forget it, everything is destroyed.'

I went out from Beirut as my mother went out from Jaffa: with just the dress I was wearing and the few things I had for me and Rana. My mother had her luggage and that of the nieces. Before getting into the small car, the driver asked who had travel documents as a Lebanese Palestinian. I said my daughter. Saeb had taken all the necessary measures to get Rana a passport of her own as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon at her birth. The driver told me, 'We will have on the road Israeli soldiers and Christian militias. Whatever the circumstances, do not show this passport.' I hid it in one of her pampers, the best place I could think of. We left in the car, my brother and husband following us as far as they could before entering the eastern part of Beirut. It was an unforgettable moment saying goodbye there. Saeb took Rana and held her for some moments. He said, 'Isn't it amazing how history repeats itself? When my mother left Jaffa, I was six months old. Now Rana is leaving Beirut, and she is six months old.' I just said, 'Take care of yourself because of her.' Then the air bombardment started again, and I was saying 'Go away!

Hurry, go away!’ and we drove off with them just standing there waving.

1982 was for me my Nakba. At the age of 33, I was forced to leave Lebanon, the place of my birth, childhood, adolescence, the only country I knew, my friends, my whole life. I lived it as yet just another displacement of my family and people, another phase of being pursued by the Israelis.

We had a long drive to Chtaura, a town in the north just before the Syrian frontier, and what I recall all along the road is destruction and smoke everywhere. We were stopped at one checkpoint with Phalangist militia and Israeli soldiers who spoke Arabic. One asked the driver, ‘Where are you going?’ The driver answered, ‘These are friends who came to visit and now are leaving.’ He asked for our passports. We all had Jordanian passports. He checked our names against a long list. The soldier asked, ‘You are visiting and you are going to leave now?’ I thought to myself, the Israelis don’t care when you are leaving; they care only when you are coming in. He asked about the baby, and I said I didn’t have time to get her passport. Finally he allowed us to pass, dismissing us with a wave of his hand. The driver dropped us off at Chtaura, where we took a taxi to the frontier.

At the frontier, we saw another aspect of the conflict: huge amounts of people, mostly women and children, and the Israeli air force passing by faster than the speed of sound, not bombarding but terrifying the people. We went to pass, knowing that Jordanians were allowed entry into Syria without a visa. The official told us, ‘You can all pass. Only the baby is not allowed to enter.’ I was astonished, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘The Palestinian refugee from Lebanon must obtain previous permission before entering.’ I tried to remain calm, ‘But it is war. How are we supposed to ask permission?’ He answered, ‘That is not my business, but you cannot enter. No one told you to leave.’ That is when I lost my mind, and all the anger, the frustration, the fear, the pain I was feeling because I am leaving everything, it exploded. ‘I am sorry, but perhaps if you were there helping us we could have changed the way the war took shape!’ Mother tried to calm me, but I continued. ‘Is that why all these people are here at the frontier, because you won’t allow them to enter? Leaving them at the mercy of the Israeli airplanes?’ He said, ‘We don’t want another influx of refugees here. As I said, you are free to enter, or you are free to return.’ Where will I leave my daughter if I enter? And he knows I cannot return! I refused to go away until a solution was found.

After an hour, a new shift came on. My mother went to speak to him to explain the situation. His attitude was different: ‘The rules are the rules,’ he said, ‘but here is what I can do: Your daughter can take the

baby, but leave the passport here, and I will send a telegram ahead about the permit. You can return tomorrow to see if the permit had been approved.' I showed him our tickets to Cyprus as proof we were only passing through Damascus, but it did no good. We stayed with some of mother's family she hadn't seen in a long time. She wanted to spend a few days with them. I said, 'No way. I am going to get Rana's passport and her permit to pass in the morning, and we are flying to Cyprus with or without you!' We slept one night in Damascus and by the next day we were all on the plane to Cyprus.

We chose Cyprus because it was the closest place to Lebanon to be in contact with the men. At the time it was a tourist center and you could get a visa at the airport. There was a long queue. This time, I was the first in line for our family in case we had more problems. I was moved and surprised by the human attitude of the policeman there: He asked me after looking at Rana's passport, 'Her father is still in Beirut? Then here is a one-month visa for you and your daughter. It can be renewed at any police station if you need. And I hope your husband will be well.' I commented to my mother: 'Here we have a brotherly welcome from a policeman in Cyprus, while we receive a cold reception from those who are our Arab brothers!'

We left Beirut two weeks before the official evacuation started. We found a small furnished apartment. The queue for the telephone was long and sometimes the phone lines into Beirut were not working, but we called when we arrived to say we are OK, we are in Cyprus, are you OK? We had a representative in Cyprus, and we agreed to leave our news there if we were not able to communicate directly by phone. There was still no word if brother or Saeb were on the lists or not.

I was very depressed, but my mother shook me out of it: 'Stop thinking about your pain and think about your daughter and nieces. They are missing their lives, too.' I began taking them to the beach and that provided a few moments of joy. I bought Rana her first bikini and the nieces delighted at the sand castles and the water. I took Rana for walks in her carriage in the afternoon. And I remember Rana's first words. When I wanted to calm her down, I would sing her an Egyptian lullaby: 'Mama will be coming soon, bringing joys and toys.' I would replace 'mama' with '*baba*' ['father' in Arabic]. As much as I sang her this song, the first word from her I heard with joy one morning: 'baba.'

I was hanging onto the news, watching the television, trying to follow what was going on. Even as the accord was being reached, days preceding the evacuation, there was heavy Israeli bombardment, perhaps the most destructive of all. I was sure I had lost my husband, my brother, my father. I thought to myself, father was right: You



cannot trust any agreement with the Israelis. He had had the experience of 1948.

It was clear in the negotiations that Arafat wanted to make this a victory and not an act of surrender, which is why he insisted on all the symbols of dignity: Israelis barred from the evacuation route, the men all wearing their khakis and carrying their rifles. Just before leaving, someone asked Arafat, 'Where are you going?' He replied, 'To Palestine!' We were astonished that even in the face of this outcome, he still had optimism. You may agree or disagree with his ideas, but he was really a leader who could, even in the most difficult and hopeless situations, transform the moment into a new momentum to move forward. He was pragmatic and realistic. The Israelis and the Americans had to recognize the PLO politically with these accords, even if the accords were for evacuation. To me, the images of the evacuation transmitted by television resembled so much the images I had seen of the forced exile of 1948: the same separation of family, with young men hugging their mothers and fathers holding their children. But this time there were people throwing rice and shooting into the air as a sign of honoring the fedaiyeen. In every aspect, there was an appearance and spirit of victory not defeat: Not only could Sharon not enter West Beirut, but the Americans and the Israelis had to negotiate even indirectly with the PLO. The PLO could not be ignored in any search for a political solution.

One day I reached my father and he said two sentences before the phone was cut off: 'We are fine,' and 'Your brother and your husband are on the list. ...'

Which ship? Going to where? I called our representative in Cyprus. My brother's ship would be stopping in Cyprus on its way to Tunisia. I asked the representative to arrange for me to get on the ship, but he said it was forbidden. I pleaded. Finally, I got a call: 'Be at the port on this day, at this time. You will have 15 minutes exactly.' When I entered the ship, it was one of the most awful things I ever recall. There were so many men on this ship, some I knew, some were vaguely familiar from the movement. I was pushing to reach a man I recognized from the camp and who knew my brother. When I finally reached him, I asked about his family and learned they had stayed in the camp. When I asked why he had not sent them to Tunisia, he replied, 'To where, another exile? They will stay and her brother will help her. Later, when the Sabra massacre occurred, I remembered this man. He had been so sure the international forces would protect the refugees.

My brother was on the upper berth. I was searching for him in the crowd, and there he was with his two sons, all wearing khakis. He

asked about his daughters and then told me, 'Your husband will be on the ship to Aden, I don't know when.' I wanted to take the boys with me, but he said, 'No, just take care of the two girls.' He had a message from Father: Mother should go to Cairo and wait for him. It was a rushed conversation, and I had already taken up 15, maybe 20 minutes.

Seeing this ship full of men, I knew that Lebanon was no longer an option for us. I left the ship and cried like a baby on the port. Beirut is finished for us, I thought. I was losing the only home I ever knew. I remembered then something that Father had said when he was convincing me to leave Beirut: 'You and your husband have taken a choice, and, like it or not, your future is linked to the future of the PLO, your condition is linked to the condition of the PLO.'

I went home and gave Mother the message from Father, but she would not leave until she knew Saeb had arrived in Aden safely. It took another two weeks or more before our representative called to say he had received a message from Saeb: He had arrived in Aden and wanted me to stay with Rana in Cyprus. Now that we knew Saeb was safe, Mother left for Egypt with the two nieces. I don't know where she got her strength. Perhaps she couldn't allow herself to be weak, with so much responsibility, especially for the future of her two granddaughters.

I sent a reply to Saeb's message via our representative, with two sentences: 'Prepare visas at airport in Aden for Rana and me. Will inform you of time and date of arrival.' I decided that, no matter what security issues we faced, our family will not be separated. It was a different choice than my mother's: She had put us first, providing for our stability and better opportunities for living and education, even when the price was separation from father. I made the choice that from now on, wherever Saeb is, that is where Rana and I will be.

It was not at all easy to get to Aden because of all the formalities of Palestinian travel. The travel agent told me the only way to get to Yemen is to pass through Kuwait.<sup>26</sup> 'Do you have a visa for Kuwait?' No. 'You should have visa. You will need an official fax sent to me saying you will have a visa at the airport.' The next day, Saeb sent a fax saying, 'Visa at airport in Yemen.' The travel agent said, 'They will send you back in Kuwait.' Although I said I would take responsibility for this, I still had to buy a roundtrip ticket to and from Cyprus in case they sent me back at Kuwait. The company did not want to be responsible. In Kuwait, there was an eight-hour layover at the airport. I got in line for the check-in to Aden. I was refused. I argued for half an hour, showing the telegram, saying, 'What is your problem? This is not your job. The officials in Aden will be the ones to decide to refuse or allow me in, and I have a return ticket if there is a problem.'

I was very determined, with a baby on my arm. Finally he said, ‘OK, but it is your responsibility.’ We were finally on the plane.

We reached Aden. Our representatives in some countries have the status of embassies, so they are treated as diplomats. I saw Saeb driving in his car toward the plane. He was shaking his head, but with a smile. ‘What will I do with a stubborn woman like you?’ he asked. He took Rana in his arms and wouldn’t let her go. Really, Rana came to us at a time when we needed hope and reason to continue. In the few weeks since we had seen each other, he had lost weight. ‘What’s happened to you?’ I said. He answered, ‘Nothing, except I was seven nights, eight days on a ship coming from Beirut to Aden. You know how I am with the ocean, never letting go of the life preserver!’ And I thought to myself, *Yes, that’s twice we had been pushed to the sea to escape: 1948, and again in 1982.*<sup>27</sup>

### 14 Years on the Road

I did not know that Aden will be only my first stop. From Aden to Sharjah to Tunisia I will discover this Arab world, that the Arab nationalist movement was calling for its unity ‘from the ocean to the gulf,’ as Jamal Abdel Nasser had said. I will discover the political, economic and social disparities caused mainly by the colonialist period and its policies of dividing us in different, and sometimes arbitrary, frontiers which will be also sources of conflicts and in some cases war. Abu Omar was so right when he described the policies of the great powers as ‘dividing to dominate,’ ‘dividing to better exploit.’<sup>28</sup>

#### *Aden*

When Samia arrived with Rana in Aden, she understood why Saeb had wanted them to remain in Cyprus: the city was struggling to absorb the sharp increase in population and it was hard to find an available apartment. There were shortages in furniture, clothing and even a variety of food. “Yes, Cyprus might have been better for our well-being. But I told Saeb, ‘You must know, wherever you are, Rana and I are with you.’ Like my father, Saeb was always concerned by the wellbeing of the children even if it meant he would miss their presence. I, on the contrary, wanted my family to be together whatever the conditions. Nothing was more valuable to me. I would do it as long as I could.”

In 1982, Aden, the capital of South Yemen from 1967 to 1990, gave its name to the country. Despite its long history and glorious past, South Yemen was still a developing country. Although the living was austere, Samia was impressed by the generosity of the people and the social situation of the women: People were hard working, and women were educated, could move freely and safely through the streets, and held professional jobs in hospitals and universities. Samia was also impressed by the “solidarity of the Aden leadership and people in their dealings with the Palestinians.” The small and tight-knit Palestinian community included a number of teachers, doctors, students, friends and colleagues of the Bamiehs from Lebanon who had also been evacuated to Aden, as well as some PLO military troops who had evacuated.

The PLO leadership visited Aden often and the Palestinian community had opportunity to meet with Abu Ammar.<sup>29</sup> “He was a man keen to keep in touch with people and he often requested to meet directly with the Palestinian community in one country or another in the Diaspora.” At the time, there was widespread debate taking place within the Palestinian community in Aden and elsewhere.

There was a push for a Fatah congress to discuss and evaluate what had happened and the outcome of the war in Lebanon. The discussions were open, as always, but the criticisms were harsh and there was a lot of anger within the cadres. I also thought a general conference at this time was very important. We were entering a new era: far from the Palestinian border, the dispersal of the PLO and its institutions and troops. It was time to stop and assess, evaluate the past to make a plan for the future. The war of 1982 brought me to the conclusion that there was no military solution to this conflict. The Israelis, with all their military power and supremacy, could not break the Palestinian will to achieve their independence, their right to

statehood and their recognition as a people. At the same time, the Palestinians could not achieve their goals through armed struggle. But what other strategy was available? At the time, there were plenty of questions, but little by way of a clear message about options for the future.

As for Samia, her work had focused on political and social issues in the refugee camps, mainly with women and encouraging their presence in decision-making roles; she was unsure how she would move forward in her engagement in the new context. “I was at a crossroads, so I decided not to take on any activity and to focus on Rana. I needed time, not only to adapt with the new living situation, but mostly to think over how to direct my commitment in this new political era.

### *Sharjah*

Within a year, Saeb was transferred from Aden to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to work on economic issues in the Gulf and African countries for the PLO. Samia was newly pregnant with her second child and, having experienced complications with her first pregnancy, left for Cairo to be with her mother while Saeb found the family’s apartment in UAE. On the way to Cairo, Samia had the opportunity to stop in Sanaa, the capital city of the Yemen Arab Republic, the other half of what was then a divided Yemen. A rich country compared to Aden, Sanaa was “beautiful, with the shops full and the houses embedded into the mountainside.” Yet, despite its wealth, the social conditions were a shock for Samia. “It was as though the plane had landed in the Middle Ages.” The men were in traditional clothing, lavishly embellished daggers slipped into their belts, almost all of them chewing *kaat*. Most of the women were covered in black chador, only small slits for their eyes.

It was yet another aspect of this large Arabic nation, with its stark diversity and its gaps in development. I was a fervent Arab nationalist, but for the first time I began to question how we could be unified ‘from the ocean to the gulf.’<sup>30</sup>

In Cairo, Samia had her first reunification with her father, mother and nieces since the Beirut evacuation. They all stayed together in a furnished apartment.

The events in Lebanon were not yet settled and yet here they were, my parents settled at least temporarily. Mother had not yet sent for her things packed in Beirut and they were still paying the rent on that apartment — she will continue to pay the rent there until my father’s death a few years later, as though Beirut was still an option for her.

After two months in Cairo, ending her seventh month of pregnancy, Samia and Rana continued on to Sharjah, one of the seven emirates of the UAE, to join Saeb. As the plane landed, Samia took note of the irony: In 1971, Saeb had been offered a lucrative job in the newly independent UAE and had gladly refused the offer. “We were committed to the revolution and would not leave Beirut or trade our life for one of money. It was not our purpose or ambition. So here I was coming to UAE not by choice but in a way as a refugee.” Saeb had rented an apartment, leaving it for Samia to furnish. “I was in a hurry to furnish the small two-bedroom apartment he rented; like my mother, it was the third apartment I was putting in place, this time hoping it will be for a longer time that we will stay here.” Still, she says, “I didn’t furnish it as though we were staying forever.”

With no family or friends close by, Samia knew she would have to count on herself for Rana and the baby on the way. When it was time to deliver, only Saeb was waiting outside; Rana was left with the neighbors. Their second child was a boy, Majed, named after Majed Abu Sharar, a revolutionary leader of Fatah who had been assassinated by the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, while in Rome. Samia devoted herself to full-time motherhood:

a difficult but beautiful period. The births of Rana and Majed were a real blessing. It came at a time were our lives were in turmoil and uncertainty, but I concentrated on my children's wellbeing and happiness, which helped me to overcome my resentments. I rediscovered with them the simple joy of everyday life.

With Saeb traveling frequently for business, "I was finding myself like my mother, having to take care of the household alone." Two women, a Palestinian from Lebanon and a Lebanese married to a Palestinian with small children, lived downstairs and together they pooled their resources to become "like a substitute family for each other." Her mother came for a visit that fall and in following years. "She was a great help, wonderful as a grandmother, indulgent and tender, telling stories at night. During her visits, she always left the children with wonderful memories."

In the UAE, Samia was introduced to a new Palestinian community. Most of the Palestinians were from the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon. While Sharjah was a middle-class community of professionals, the Dubai and Abu Dhabi community was wealthy and established. Samia found yet again the different spaces of the Diaspora. The Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman) were a target destination for migrants from the Arab world and Asian countries: Iranians, Indians, Pakistanis Egyptians, Jordanians, Lebanese, Palestinians. Beginning in the 1950s, the Palestinians constituted a substantial part of the expatriate communities in those states — first in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, especially with the start of the oil industries and development projects in these countries.

With the 1967 war, a second wave of Palestinians came, followed by a third after the 1982 war. All were seeking better opportunities to find a job, invest and make enough income to live, save, help other family members back home, and settle for a longer period if they could.

Indeed, as many have said, the history of the Palestinian Diaspora is a history of dispossession. For me, it wasn't about making money, and it wasn't to accumulate material goods. I felt a stranger in a way. Palestinians were from a different social setting; they were lawyers, physicians, engineers, bankers, teachers, worked in technology-related professions — and were big investors, too. Yet, we all came together when it was about national events: for the commemoration of the Nakba, for example, the Day of the Land or during the first intifada. Among the different expatriates in UAE, something seemed strange for me in this new social setting. There was no integration of the different communities in the local environment or among communities — as if communities were living in parallel to each other. Each community had its own social network, clubs, and even for some their own residential areas.

Since the Beirut evacuation, Samia had not worked for the revolution. But two major events vaulted her again into political activity: the meeting of the fourth general conference of the GUPW in 1985, and the beginning of the first intifada in the OPT in 1987.

The fourth conference was intended to reaffirm the leadership of the GUPW, reunite members around a future strategy, and elect a new administrative council and general secretariat. The conference came at a moment of crisis in the Palestinian national movement at large after the decision to evacuate in 1982. There was a split in Fatah, and some Palestinian organizations — with the support of the Syrian regime — formed an opposition front to the PLO. It was crucial to reaffirm the legality and the representations of the different unions affiliated with the PLO, and avert any attempt to create parallel institutions.

Samia, invited as an UAE branch delegate, attended the conference, allowing her to reunite briefly with some of her dear friends dispersed in other countries or still working in the camps in Lebanon. At the conference, Samia spearheaded a call for rigorous democratic elections for the administrative council and the general secretariat. She also chaired the political platform committee, which was responsible for formulating a single outcome statement from the diversified perspectives of GUPW members, including women from the different political factions. Under the circumstances, there was little hope the committee would be able to accomplish its goal. But, driven by a commitment to the national movement, Samia led the conversation as a democratic process to reach consensus.

I was guided by the principle father taught us — ‘Palestine is bigger than any party, above all parties’ interests’ — and by my deep conviction that without unity our struggle is weakened. I made sure to give everyone the right to speak and I continually tried to find points of convergence, however small, to build upon. We were at a crossroads in our unity as a movement and we needed consensus. When we were done, the men tried to influence the outcome document, and I said, ‘This is what we have decided as women, and we will not change a single word. It’s now up to the conference to decide.’ We succeeded in keeping the political platform we agreed upon.

At the end of four extensive days and nights of meetings, the conference concluded with Palestinian women united *as* women, with a new maturity as a women’s movement based on a common political vision. Samia was elected as one of the members of the administrative council. As emotional as the reunion was, the departure was also. They did not know when and where they would meet again.

In 1987, two years after the GUPW conference, a mass popular uprising erupted inside the OPT. The *Intifada* (or “uprising”) was called “the revolution of the stones,” because the population faced the Israeli army only with stones. Focusing primarily on large-scale civil disobedience, the uprising engaged all sectors of Palestinian society — young and old, men and women — and changed the center of the resistance from the Diaspora to the territory itself. Local leadership formed to lead the struggle on the ground and coordinate actions with the PLO leadership in Tunisia.

“When it started, I saw a great opportunity for our national struggle, this time based on Palestinian territory.” The Intifada signaled a new way to resist the occupation: “It was a direct confrontation between the population and the Israeli army. The new circumstances created a new type of struggle and demanded creative strategies.” While discerning a new strategy to adopt, Abu Jihad (Khalil El Wazir) a founding member of Fatah,<sup>31</sup> was assassinated in Tunisia by the Mossad. It was April 1988. Israeli authorities thought that killing Abu Jihad would weaken the Intifada. The loss

was great, but the answer came from the OPT. After he was killed, huge demonstrations spread over the OPT and the Intifada continued.

The first year of the Intifada, Samia accepted the chair of the GUPW conference preparatory committee for the UAE branch, and at the 1987 elections of that branch, she was elected president. Drawing on her experience in Lebanon, she worked on growing the grassroots level of Palestinian women throughout the seven emirates. While she confronted the usual resistance about the involvement of women in public and political affairs, she also noticed a shift in attitudes. As it had historically, the women's movement advanced with the national movement, and the Intifada was a time where women gained new ground. "When the Intifada started, the Palestinians in the Diaspora were all mobilized — politically, emotionally, financially — and women, even those from conservative milieu, were called upon and ready to play an important role."

The main focus of the UAE branch — like all of the branches of the GUPW — was to financially support the different women's organizations in the OPT, raising awareness throughout the emirates of the struggle of the Intifada and the harsh military conditions of the occupation. Fundraising was a central task, and the branch arranged six benefit galas in the following years. At times, raising funds was challenging because some in the wealthy classes were suspicious and critical of the PLO. In order to appeal to this class, Samia created a mechanism so that the UAE branch could provide assurances that contributions were going directly to beneficiaries in the OPT.

I wrote to Arafat for branch approval to establish a fund for Palestinian children in the occupied territory separate from the PLO account. Our request was approved. The fund was supervised by a committee with representatives nominated by the community — bankers, businessmen, architects — and the executive committee of the UAE Branch.

Outside of establishing the children's fund, the UAE branch also helped to financially support Palestinian women's associations on the ground in the OPT.

Transparency was essential, so all the funding requests from women's associations inside the OPT were brought before the committee, which would then choose what project to fund. With this partnership we were able to raise funds and raise awareness at the same time throughout the seven emirates.

These projects were also seen as part of the resistance: growing women's capacity to contribute to what was called the "steadfastness" of the national movement. The new projects most often coupled women's empowerment with micro-enterprise ventures, providing agricultural assistance to farm women or forming small cooperatives. "If you know how to farm your own land, if you know how to launch and run a micro-business, you are adding to the sustainability of the movement."

Women in the OPT also attended protests, directly facing Israeli forces. Indeed, the methods of response used by the Israeli forces during the uprising resulted in mass injuries and heavy loss of life among the civilian Palestinian population. Women played a central part in keeping Palestinian society going in the face of Israeli tactics. The UAE branch hosted two delegations of representatives from inside the OPT for tours of the emirates to raise awareness about the conditions within the OPT and the ways in which the population had mobilized its resistance. One of these tours included three released prisoners from Israeli detention centers, who told of mass



arrests and arbitrary incarceration. The other was a group of three women, two from women's organizations and the other a professor, who addressed the different forms of civil disobedience and struggle in the OPT.

It was a real learning experience about the struggle. People attended peaceful demonstrations against the military in their towns and villages, set up strikes against Israeli businesses, and everyone refused to pay taxes to the Israeli civil administration. Since the Israeli authorities had closed the schools and universities, a parallel educational system had been established and teachers were holding classes in their houses, churches, mosques. Clinics had also been established to care for the wounded.

The tour was organized by the GUPW and funded by the Palestinian community in coordination with local emirates' women's organizations. Thus, even as the Intifada helped to mobilize women in the OPT, so it helped to galvanize GUPW branches in the Diaspora to mobilize in support of their sisters.

The events of the Intifada forced the Palestinian question onto the international scene, primarily through the mass media and the "images of the brutality of the occupation. [Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin said at this time: 'Break their bones!' and that is what we were seeing on television in the confrontation.

In November 1988, the PLO leadership convened in Algiers for an extraordinary meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), which served as the Palestinian parliament in exile. On November 15, at the end of the deliberations, the PNC proclaimed "the establishment of the state of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem (Al Quds)." The declaration of independence pointed out that "because of the Intifada and its revolutionary irreversible impulse, the history of Palestine has therefore arrived at a decisive juncture."<sup>32</sup> The declaration helped to solidify the gains of the Intifada into a political solution. Declaring the right to "self-determination, political independence, and sovereignty over its territory," the state of Palestine was committed to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" as well as a "peace based upon justice and the respect of rights." Adopting U.N. General Assembly 181 (the partition plan of 1947), as well as resolutions 242 and 338, the declaration accepted for the first time a two-state solution.

Acknowledging the steadfastness of and honoring the contributions to the revolution of all sectors of Palestinians — within the OPT and in the refugee camps outside the homeland — the declaration also determined what kind of a state the Palestinians were looking for:

The state of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be. The state is for them to enjoy in their collective national and cultural identity, theirs to pursue in it a complete equality of rights. In it will be safeguarded their political and religious convictions and their human dignity by means of a parliamentary democratic system of governance, itself based on freedom of expression and the freedom to form parties. The rights of minorities will duly be respected by the majority, as minorities must abide by decisions of the majority. Governance will be based on principles of social justice, equality and nondiscrimination in public rights of men or women, on grounds of race, religion, color or sex, and the aegis of the constitution which ensures the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Thus shall these principles

allow no departure from Palestine's age-old spiritual and civilizational heritage of tolerance and religious coexistence.

The declaration was the result of extensive deliberation within the PNC, with the poet Mahmoud Darwish helping to draft the final document. The principles of the declaration were the source of the future basic law of the PNA and the Palestinian constitution. In the declaration, women found a strong ally of their demands of rights.

The political momentum was building. Within 10 days of the declaration, more than 50 countries recognized the state, with more to follow. On December 13, 1988, Abu Ammar was invited to address the U.N. General Assembly, but in Geneva rather than New York, after the U.S. denied him a visa. The Palestinians, including Samia, were moved with pride and a sense of victory.

On December 15, the General Assembly voted on resolution 43/176: Question of Palestine, calling for an international conference for peace, with the participation of PLO on equal footing with all other parties and on the basis of relevant U.N. resolutions. Israel and the United States voted against. "Through our long history with U.N. resolutions, we were skeptical about its implementation, but nevertheless it was a victory for the Palestinians since it reflected a broad approval of nations on the necessity of resolving the conflict, respecting the legitimate rights of the Palestinians in self-determination, and calling for ending the occupation and settlements."

In August 1989, a general conference of Fatah was held in Tunisia. As the leading movement of the PLO, it was crucial that the organization gather and commit to the new strategy. "The conference was overdue. After the dispersion of Beirut, it was difficult to find a place for everyone to gather." Samia was invited to be a member of the conference, and attended to learn the direction of the Fatah movement, eager to see if there would be an assessment and evaluation of 1982. "It was a huge conference, with cadres coming from throughout the world, around 1,000 delegates." A time of reunion — Samia was able to see many old friends from the party in the Diaspora — the conference was also a time of revitalization. Many Fatah leaders had been lost in the Lebanese Civil War, others through assassinations by the Israeli secret service, while some had joined dissident splinter groups. Elections of the central and revolutionary committees were therefore urgent.

Everything was put on the table for assessment. There was outspoken criticism of the leadership, and the political platform and measures to be taken for accountability were thoroughly analyzed. In the end, the conference voted to support the Declaration of Independence, the Palestinian peace initiative and Arafat — despite all the criticism — was re-endorsed as the president of Fatah and the commander in chief. "As George Habash, the leader of PFLP, said in the framework of the PLO, 'We can disagree *with* Abu Ammar but we do not disagree *on* him.' This was also the case in Fatah." Nevertheless, only seven members of the old leadership were voted back onto the central committee. "It was noticeable that if the founder members and leadership were mostly refugees, the newcomers were originally from the West Bank and Gaza. It may have been an outcome of the Intifada."

For the first time, a woman was elected to the central committee: Intissar al-Wazir, spouse of Abu Jihad. The number of women on the revolutionary council increased from one to eight. While this did not reflect the number of women militants in the movement or their contributions, it was still a breakthrough and a step forward. For Samia,

It was clear this was a time of renewal for the movement, through this process of a democratic conference. With the wide support of the declaration of independence and the peace initiative, we thought history was moving in the right direction.

### *Tunis*

Beginning in June 1990, Samia and her children traveled to Tunisia, where her sister was living and her mother visiting, to spend the summer with them. It was a much-needed rest; just days before Samia had held the last GUPW UAE branch gala for the season, for the benefit of the Intifada. She looked forward to spending time with her children, who she felt she had been neglecting because of the work of the UAE branch.

On August 2, Samia and the family woke to shocking news. Iraqi troops had invaded Kuwait. President Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait and the UAE of not respecting the quota on the production of oil set by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC], which he deemed “economic warfare” on Iraq. Hussein also had grievances against Saudi Arabia, but “no one believed he would go as far as occupying another Arab country.” He refused to withdraw, in defiance of a number of U.N. Security Council resolutions, economic sanctions and even threats from the international community that they would intervene.

Samia and the family decided it would be best for her and the two children to remain in Tunisia, despite the school year beginning in September, and wait to see how events would develop. Considering the strategic importance of the area to the oil interests of the Western countries, it was expected the region would explode in a conflagration of warfare in the absence of a political solution. According to UAE law, after six months out of the country, residency visas expire.

I found myself living in Tunisia. Mother, who we were planning to move to my sister’s because of her deteriorating health, played a big role in my decision to stay, saying, “The Americans have come. War will happen. You don’t know what will happen in the Gulf. You don’t need to go back and jeopardize the safety of your children. You have your sister here.” That touched a weak point. Her remark about the safety of the children revived memories of the 1982 war, the siege of Beirut and the evacuation. With all these conditions, Saeb and I took the decision that while he would go back to Sharjah, I and the children would stay.

Once more, Samia looked for an apartment. Once more, she investigated schools for the children, choosing a French school because “I was already thinking about the next place, and I knew the French diploma could be carried to other countries.” Majed entered first grade, Rana second grade, and Saeb returned to the UAE for work, visiting when he could. “I stayed with the children in Tunisia. I considered myself as an ongoing displaced person. I did not leave Lebanon on my own choice. I did not come to UAE or move to Tunisia of my own choosing, as one can do in normal situations.”

January of 1991 proved to be a dramatic and tragic month for Samia. January 15 was the date set by the Security Council for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face military intervention. The day passed, and a U.S.-led coalition of 38 countries soon launched Operation Desert Storm, with massive air strikes and missile attacks on targets in Iraq and Kuwait. “I called it the Atari war, because we were watching it on CNN and all you saw were the bright lights of missiles, the

explosions, but never the impact on human life.” On the eve of the airstrikes, two members of the Fatah leadership were assassinated in Tunisia by the Abu Nidal organization, which was funded by Iraq. And on January 18, Samia’s mother passed away after being hospitalized for two days because of heart problems. “Her situation deteriorated rapidly.” Mother requested to be buried next to her ancestors in the family plot in Algeria. Despite the war, Samia and her family took the necessary measures so her final wish would be respected.

The Gulf crisis and the war to force Iraq out of Kuwait was a turning point on many levels. The crisis in inter-Arab relations — due to a split in the position between those who voted for a military solution and coalition with U.S. and the West, and those who opted for an Arab solution through mediation — would last for some time.

“Most importantly, as usual, it was the populations who paid the heaviest price of conflicts and wars.” For some expatriates who were working in Kuwait before the war, the failure of their respective governments and the PLO to take a clear stand of unconditional support of the country and oppose a military solution, led to harsher reactions from the governments in the Gulf states against some nationalities more than others. Restricted residence policies, threats and outright expulsion affected between 400,000 and 450,000 Palestinians in Kuwait, the largest and oldest Palestinian community in the Gulf. “It was the third big dispersion, after ’48 and ’67.”

With the children adjusted in school, Samia knew she wanted to work but wasn’t sure in what capacity. Two of her colleagues were working under Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) in the External and Arab Affairs Department of the PLO. They asked her to come on board, but Samia needed some time to think it over.

Around the same time, the same two colleagues asked her to join them at a meeting in Geneva in May of 1991. The three-day meeting was organized by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and was intended as a meeting for dialogue, bringing together Israeli and Palestinian women, and representatives of international NGOs, for the first time since the Gulf War, to discuss “international strategies for the implementation of U.N. resolutions on Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and propose concrete steps towards advancing the peace process.”<sup>33</sup> She was initially reluctant to attend, but was intrigued by the international framework of the meeting and its timing so close to an American intention to convene a peace conference. She was also eager to meet women from the OPT; living in the Diaspora, she had few chances to do so.

I finally agreed, but on one condition. I said, ‘You will not push me to talk to the Israeli women. Do not expect that.’ Those in the Diaspora didn’t have direct contact with the Israelis. They were the ones responsible for our displacements, the planes bombing us, the soldiers occupying us. They were only the military. The WILPF meeting was the first time I could put human faces on Israelis. But the most important thing for me was the voices I heard from some of the Israeli women, especially Tamar Godjanski from the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and a member of the Knesset. I also met those in Women in Black, an organization I was told by my sisters in the OPT was active against the occupation during the First Intifada. These voices condemned strongly the occupation and the settlements in the OPT, and they sympathized with the plight of the Palestinians and their right to liberty, independence and statehood. It was important for me to hear these Israeli voices.

Samia says she owes to these women the fact that they raised her curiosity about what was happening in the other side “and played a role in my future belief that there is a possibility of joining forces to end occupation and seek a political solution to the conflict.” Nevertheless, she could not bring herself to “salute even these women at this time. The 1982 war on Lebanon, its atrocities, the huge losses of life, destruction, our forced dispersion — they were blocking me. So many old deep wounds too that had not healed.”

The Israeli and Palestinian women “did not agree on every point” (as the record of the meeting pointed out) and there were moments of tension and deep emotions. Samia left the meeting room twice.

I could not bear to hear some voices defending settlements or raising excuses for the occupation. They were few, it’s true, but loud enough and sometimes arrogant enough to push you to leave the room. I remember at one point I poured my anger on my colleagues, saying I was stupid to listen to them and come. But finally I stayed, thinking about our sisters in the OPT who have to endure every day such thoughts and behaviors. They came despite all, one of them with her small baby who was still breastfeeding.

The three-day meeting and long night of negotiations ended with a final agreed-upon statement about the participants’ set of principles, values and goals. The most important points to Samia were those concerning their vision for peace and security. They shared “a vision of freedom and equality in their common struggle against discrimination, oppression and subjugation of any type, be it on the basis of gender, religion or nationality.” They declared “their commitment to a peaceful solution of the conflict on the basis of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338,” the land-for-peace formula of Israel and Palestine co-existing peacefully within secure and recognized boundaries, and supported “negotiations between the Israeli government and the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the PLO.”

When I look back today to this document, I can say that it was an inspiration in all of the upcoming joint work for reaching peace, by the vision it designed and the set of values and principles. It also shows how much women, when talking about peace, link it to justice and the respect of human rights. They also translate their positions into very concrete actions or steps. But also, as we shall see along the road of searching for peace, decision makers unfortunately do not take into consideration the views and recommendations of women. They subject peace to the balance of power, while women try to redress the asymmetries that exist between conflict parties. Women look to details.

It was also an important meeting for Samia because she was able to spend a bit of time with women from the OPT and learn about the realities on the ground.

When she returned to Tunisia, Samia joined Abu Mazen’s office, working as part of a follow-up committee to the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991. It aimed to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and the Arab states based on U.N. SCR 242 (1967) and U.N. SCR 338 (1973), the land-for-peace formula. The conference was mostly ceremonial, but negotiations continued in Washington, D.C., between Palestine, Israel and the U.S. At PLO

headquarters, Abu Mazen put together a committee to closely follow the negotiations — analyzing the minutes, crafting positions and providing briefings. The committee was a close circle, its members held in the strictest confidence.

Working with Abu Mazen was a political choice. All my questions had not been answered, but I felt that linking to the negotiations was a way to implement my belief that a military situation must be replaced with a political solution. Maybe, who knows, it could be possible.

Samia's task as part of the committee was to follow the Israeli position, reading the minutes with a meticulous eye to detail.

The first time I read the minutes, I was shocked: *What are they selling us, Camp David again?* They were discussing again a Palestinian administrative council to oversee the daily life of Palestinians, but with no discussion of sovereignty on the land, resources, no willingness to discuss the settlements. We were back at Camp David in 1979, which we had refused years ago. At the same time, the Israelis were abdicating their responsibility to provide services as an occupying power: they were willing to give this responsibility to a Palestinian administration, but with no right to self-determination, not recognizing the land as occupied, but rather as disputed territory. At the same time, rather than dismantling settlements, the Israelis were expanding them, even during negotiations, creating what they called 'new realities on the ground,' so that finally the establishment of any integral Palestinian state would be impossible. As Hanan Ashrawi, spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation at the time, summarized the Israeli position, 'The Israelis are telling us what is ours are ours and what is yours is also ours.'

Secretary of State James Baker and the U.S. State Department were conducting meetings in preparation for Madrid and its follow-up. Samia saw the struggle of putting together a Palestinian delegation for the negotiations themselves: the Israelis insisted on no Palestinians from the Diaspora, no Palestinians with PLO affiliation, no Palestinians from East Jerusalem. The American endorsed these conditions. In the end, even Faisal al Hussein and Hanan Ashrawi, the main interlocutors for Baker, were not allowed at the negotiations.

Although the PLO was barred from the actual negotiations, the "political kitchen" was an example of how the "PLO and Intifada leadership worked together to evaluate the talks and define positions. Hanan and Faisal made sure to stress to the Americans from the first meeting that their mandate came from the PLO." Samia was at the meeting where they, at the invitation of Abu Ammar, briefed the Central Council of the PLO in Tunisia.

Arafat wanted to demonstrate to all that they were negotiating for Palestinians both inside and outside, and that they were mandated by the PLO leadership. They both spoke eloquently about how the Intifada must have a political outcome, and that this was an opportunity to end the occupation by political means. Once again, despite dispersion, despite separation between outside and inside, with all the pressures to split us, the Palestinians succeeded to reach unity and to assemble around the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.

At the time no one, not even the PLO leadership, knew about a parallel, secret channel of negotiations taking place, under Norwegian auspices, directly between a Palestinian delegation under Abu Mazen leadership and an Israeli delegation under Shimon Peres leadership — with Arafat and Rabin approval. These talks culminated in the Oslo declaration of principles and an exchange of letters between Arafat and Rabin, wherein Arafat recognized the right of Israel to live in recognized and secure borders and Rabin recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. The Oslo accords were signed on the White House lawn on Sept. 13, 1993. From this foundation, the agreement stipulated an interim period of no longer than five years during which the two sides would negotiate “final status” issues: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security.

Samia felt there was imbalance in the mutual recognition: “We recognize the State of Israel, they recognize the PLO, but not even a sentence about our right to self-determination. Nevertheless, as someone said, the Israelis finally recognized us as a people and our political representation.”

Along with many others, Samia did not understand why settlements were saved as part of the final status talks. “Even the U.S. considered the settlements an obstacle to peace. I said at the time, ‘I am not a lawyer, but international law and U.N. resolutions say the settlements are illegal. Why are we putting them up for discussion?’” When Abu Mazen asked their opinion, Samia and her colleagues in the committee pointed to two other issues: before Oslo, there should have been an agreement on the release of all political prisoners, and there was no arbitration mechanism which would have guaranteed accountability. Abu Mazen’s position at the time was pragmatic. “In a very stormy meeting of the PLO central council meeting, he presented the accord of principles and said, ‘These are principles only. Now it is up to us how we conduct the negotiations.’”

The Oslo Agreement (Oslo II) stipulated the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), a gradual withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the creation of a Palestinian police force and the protocol of economic cooperation. Subsequent negotiations during the interim period to discuss implementation followed, and there was an agreement on the elections to be held for the president of the PNA and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Through all of this, Samia was cautiously hopeful.

At Oslo II, held in 1995, the details for the five-year interim period were worked out. “I read the final document, which was a foot thick. The details were astonishing.” The Israelis stipulated the “number of security forces to enter, where they could be deployed, the arms they can carry, the number of bullets allowed.” Samia explains that a complex security agreement was worked out, with the division of the West Bank into three zones: Zone A (the main cities) under full Palestinian control; Zone B under joint control; Zone C (settlements and areas surrounding settlements) under full Israeli control. The Palestinian police were authorized to make arrests in Zone A; they must coordinate arrest with Israeli police in Zone B; they were barred from making arrests in Zone C. The Israeli police, on the other hand, were authorized to make arrests in any of the three zones. The Palestinians were given all the responsibilities for services, but only a few of the rights needed to govern the land.

Samia also attended one of the organizational meetings in Tunis concerning the establishment of the PNA: Should the PNA be constituted by insiders alone? Exclusively from PLO leadership? A mixture? While the U.S. and Israel pushed for the PNA to include only those from inside, many felt such a tactic ensured the question of refugees would be jettisoned and the PLO

marginalized. The PNC took the resolution to establish the PNA and left it to the PLO executive committee to decide the best way to implement it, but one thing seemed sure: If Abu Ammar did not go into the OPT and chair the PNA, it would certainly fail. “We felt Arafat was reluctant and made exploratory visits to Gaza and Jericho. When he arrived in Gaza he was greeted by a huge demonstration of cheering Palestinians, swarming his car and lifting him into the air. You could see the mood of the people in the OPT at this time, hopeful to end the occupation, with mass popular support to continue the peace process.” In the end, Arafat took the chairmanship of the PNA.

Attention was turned to nation building, and as in years past the women’s movement began mobilizing to guarantee women’s rights in the framework of the PNA. Soon after Oslo, the GUPW secretariat and administrative council, of which Samia was a member, worked on a draft of the Declaration of Principles on Palestinian Women’s Rights. Based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the declaration was a call for equal opportunity for men and women in economic, political, social and citizenship rights. The GUPW oversaw the distribution of the draft to union branches in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and throughout the OPT for review, discussion and amendment, and the women inside the territories were the ones to finalize the document. “It was felt by the GUPW to be one of the successes of the women’s movement because of the scope of discussion among Palestinian women outside and inside the OPT. And there would now be an authority accountable for incorporating these rights into laws and policies.” Although the women’s movement did not succeed in convincing the leadership to adopt this bill in its entirety, the declaration was later used as a lobbying tool and platform for action in approaching the PLO and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), and some of its elements were incorporated into the basic law of the PNA and later legislations.

In the spring of 1994, Samia attended a summit of 200 Mediterranean and European women in Marrakech, Morocco. Held under the auspices of the European Community at the invitation of the Moroccan government, the Marrakesh Women’s Summit hoped to capitalize on the peace process initiated between the PLO and Israel, creating a network of Mediterranean women “to affirm the role of women in the construction of peace” in the entire region, and to discuss cooperation — in governance, economics, the NGO sector, culture and communications — among the women.<sup>34</sup>

Although the Europeans attempted to create a mood of euphoria about the prospect for peace between Israel and Palestine and pushed for a network of cooperation including Israel, Samia and others were more cautious. “We were only just starting the negotiations about peace. Normalized relations can take place only when the issues between occupier and occupied are addressed, and first among these is to eliminate the relationship of occupier and occupied itself.” The final outcome document, which some European and Israeli participants had wanted to make more pointedly optimistic, reflects the tentative hopefulness of the Arab and Mediterranean attendees. The statement acknowledges with satisfaction the agreement between the PLO and Israel, and reinforces that a comprehensive solution of the conflict is necessary for the stability of the region. As for establishing a network of women in the Mediterranean, such a task would be difficult without peace between Israel and the Arab countries.

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Although not yet fully achieved, the feeling of an opening for normalized relations was in the air. With Oslo signed, the main center of political leadership shifted to Gaza and Jericho. Just as they had left Beirut, so Palestinians were entering the OPT in controlled fashion by lists. Tunisia was no longer an option for many Palestinians, who were there only to work in one way or another with the PLO. The question, and the dilemma for those with restricted travel papers was, where to go?

The Bamiehs decided that Samia and the children would rejoin Saeb in Sharjah. Again, the children were registered in a new school; again, Samia was liquidating the house of its furnishings. But just as Samia was preparing to leave, the family learned Saeb would be included among the cadres on the list to go to the OPT. For the time being, at least, only men were included on the list and were not yet authorized to bring their families. The family's plans were suddenly changed, and Sharjah was no longer an option. Samia, among many others, was upset by the situation and approached some of the PLO leaders. "How did you accept the condition that families be split? And why only men? Suddenly women are no longer cadres, but spouses?" We were told there was a shortage of housing, of schools, and it would be difficult to settle a large number of people." They were informed that once the men were settled they would send for their families.

Still, Samia was determined to keep the family together in whatever way possible. "I said to Saeb, 'In Beirut, I made the decision to follow you wherever you are, and still I ended up with the children somewhere else. I will not separate the family again. If I have to wait for you, I will go to Jordan so that you can visit us on the weekends.'" Suddenly, Samia was liquidating two households in Sarjah and Tunis, applying for visas and residency permits in Jordan, and explaining to the children why they were relocating yet again. "This kind of return was not a joy. It did not mean reunifying with certainty. Instead, it was another displacement, another instance of separation of the family. I kept asking, 'What is this peace you have accepted, that separates rather than unites us?'"

### *Amman*

The Bamieh family arrived in Jordan in the summer of 1994. "The move was hard on the children. They had to deal with a new school and the absence of their father. They could not understand why they had to leave and not to be with their father." Once the family was settled, Samia began working part-time as an assistant of a correspondent for the French newspaper *Le Monde*. "I had always wanted so much to be in journalism, and this helped me keep updated on what was happening in the region." Angry and disappointed at many elements of the Oslo Accord implementation, Samia was eager to take a break from her political work. She was elected to the parents' committee at the children's school and worked to strengthen the Arab language curriculum. It was two months before Saeb's first visit to Amman, where he told the family about the housing shortage in the OPT, himself having to share an apartment with friends and then a cousin.

Nearly a year later, Samia and the children planned a visit to Saeb in the summer, organizing at the same time a family reunion with Samia's sisters — one from Senegal, one from Canada — and the nieces. It was her first trip to the territory since 1969, "unfortunately again under a visitor permit."

The trip was exciting and emotional. "It was the children who brought up wishing my parents could be there, too." At the border crossing, the same old wooden bridge was in use. Samia's son, Majed, had the first reaction, exclaiming and questioning: "This is all that was separating us from Palestine?"

As they crossed to the other side, a large Israeli flag was flying. Samia's daughter Rana commented, "You said we were coming to Palestine!"

Finally I told them both: "I don't want to think about the flag. I don't want to ask questions. I just want to return for a nice family reunion!" Some things had changed since 1969. The newly established Palestinian police were conducting the security checks. And some things had not changed since 1969. Because they had a foreign passport, the nieces from Canada were separated from the group and checked by the Israelis. "They were so angry, saying, 'They inspected us! They opened our suitcases!' I told them, 'Whatever your passport, your name is an Arab name, so you will be checked.'" Samia could not help remembering her own anger the first time she had crossed the checkpoint.

Like Samia's father did when they visited in 1969, Saeb pointed out the historical places along the winding road, telling the children the importance of Jericho, pointing out the prefabricated Israeli settlements on one side and stone Palestinian houses built right into the mountain on the other side of the hills to Ramallah. Two days later, the family loaded into three cars for a trip to Jaffa. One by one the cars passed the checkpoint leaving Ramallah. The young Israeli soldier at the gate exclaimed with a smile, "What's happening today? Three cars of Bamiehs!"

It was Majed who yelled back excitedly, "We are going to visit my grandfather's house in Jaffa!" The soldier gave a look of shock.

In Jaffa, some things had changed. Samia's parents had lived in a luxurious quarter, but now the houses were old and dilapidated, some still with the padlocks on the doors, put there by the Palestinian owners in 1948 before the hasty evacuation. When they finally found father's house, it was surrounded by a half-demolished fence. They knocked on the door, Samia so nervous they would be greeted as in 1969 that she had to be calmed by her eldest sister.

The knock was answered by a woman. "We introduced ourselves. 'We are from the Diaspora, and this is the house of our father and we would like to visit.'" The woman invited them to enter. There was the internal garden, and Samia began searching for the fountain and the jasmine. "I was entering this house thinking I was going to find the memory of my parents there." The stained-glass windows and the formal arches remained, but everything else had been changed and part of the house had been demolished. "I was eager to see the sea because mother was always talking about it. So we went to the balcony, and that had not changed. The sea remained the same."

Samia began asking the woman questions. "How did you get this house? I know my father didn't sell it."

"It is leased to us by the government, and there was one other tenant before us."

"How legal is that if the owner hasn't sold the house?"

Suddenly the tone of the woman changed. "Well, now the two governments recognize each other, so you will need to take that up with the government."

She had read the peace accords. She said she could understand how we felt. Her father was from Europe and forced to flee the Nazis. When she went back to his house, she was so sorry that nothing was the same. She invited us to visit any time, saying this too is our home. I was amazed by her acknowledgment.

But I was only half listening. I was taken by the sea: instead of all the displacement, here is where I should have been born, and here I should have grown up, and here my children should have been born. And I said silently to myself, ‘Father, I kept my promise. I said we would return, and here I have returned. *They have taken the stones but they cannot dispossess us from the memory*, I said to myself.

From Jaffa, the group traveled to Haifa, to Nazareth, to Akka. Upon reaching Akka, the doors to the three cars flung open and the family ran toward the sea, laughing and crying at once, the contradictory emotions from the long day exploding. A beautiful old city, much of Akka had been preserved despite the conflict in the country. “It was so impressive, recalling the history of Akka. I had the feeling I am part of this land, this history, and nothing can take away this feeling of being rooted and belonging.”

Soon it was time to return to the West Bank. Traveling along well-lit paved roads, the streets suddenly narrowed and were riddled with potholes once they passed the checkpoint. “This is what Israel had given to Palestine: responsibility for a destroyed land, torn apart in 1948 and 1967, left to disintegrate from disrepair since then.”

In September, Samia and the children left for Amman. “The children were sad to leave. They were happy to see their father, and they were happy to see their land. I think they began to understand then why we had given our lives for this land and its people.”

Shortly after their return, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist at a peace festival on Nov. 4, 1995. “It was a shock for both Israelis and Palestinians. Everything was built around Rabin concluding the peace process he had started.” Nevertheless, from November to December a series of planned Israeli redeployments out of six Palestinian towns proceeded as scheduled. By the time Samia and the children visited Saeb for the Christmas holiday, everyone was celebrating the end of occupation and the talk centered on the upcoming elections for the PNA and the PLC. “We spent Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, and it was so crowded we could barely walk. It seemed all the Palestinians were making this pilgrimage, and the atmosphere was of joy and hope.”

Presidential and legislative elections were held in January. Arafat had one rival candidate — a woman, Samiha Khalil, a well-known veteran women’s leader in the OPT. She got 12 percent of the votes. “No one thought she would win; it was more a statement that Palestinian women have the right and deserve to be candidates to the highest positions. We as women were proud of her initiative. But in the legislative council elections, only five women won seats — two from the West Bank and three from Gaza — which did not reflect the real political participation of women in the national struggle.” At the time the election system was based on district elections and there was no quota. Later, the women’s movement would successfully lobby for a quota on election lists.

In the coming months, things quickly took an unexpected turn that threatened to completely derail the peace process. In February of 1996, the Palestinian opposition group Hamas, headquartered in the Gaza Strip, attempted a series of bombings. Shimon Peres, acting Israeli prime

minister from the Labour Party, responded with the closure of the whole territory of Gaza. The Israeli excavation of a tunnel under the Haram Al-Sharif led to what is known as the Palestinian Tunnel uprising. In April, Peres launched the military operation “Grapes of Wrath,” bombarding southern Lebanon, striking a U.N. camp and killing nearly 200 civilians. The consequent international and Arab outrage cost Peres the election in an upset in June of that year. Benjamin Netanyahu from the Likud party, in strong opposition to the peace process, was elected prime minister.

Saeb was in Amman with the family the day of the election, and he and Samia followed the results by radio and television.

We went to sleep to images on the television of the Labour Party celebrating its victory. When we woke up in the morning, Peres had lost and Netanyahu had won. We discussed all morning what this meant for the peace process. We expected there to be obstacles, and we were no longer hopeful that 1999 would be the end of the interim period to reach agreement on final status issues. This was going to be a long process, and more difficulties were on the way. And with such an open-ended timeframe, we wondered what we should do as a family: How long should we continue our separation? The children joined the conversation. With joy they said, ‘We want to go to Palestine and live there.’

The family would pass the summer in Ramallah. By September, they’d be settled in their new apartment, the children attending their new French school in East Jerusalem. After a long and circuitous journey, Samia was home.

### Coming Home

For me, moving forward on building a state based on strong institutions, good governance, the rule of law and equal human rights, while moving forward to reach a just peace — both tasks were interlinked, both indispensable to our independence.

Some progress had been made by mid-1996, when Samia returned to Palestine. But the assassination of Rabin and the election of Netanyahu threatened to delay, if not entirely disrupt, this process.

It is within this context that Samia returned to Palestine; her work in the coming decade would reflect the changing situation on the ground and the evolving strategies needed to respond to these conditions. On the one hand, she began to focus on state building within the context of the new Palestinian Authority, focusing on women's issues and more broadly on creating sustainable institutions for democratic governance. On the other hand, she made linkages with Israeli peace activists to find peace with justice. As she had throughout her life, she was guided in those years by the question of where the most productive change could be produced: through working within the internal Palestinian situation or through building bridges? In the end, she would pursue both with equal vigor.

When Samia arrived in Ramallah in the summer of 1996, Zahera Kamel — whom Samia had met during her visit in 1995 — was serving as the director general of gender and gender development within the PNA's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. She wanted Samia to serve as a gender expert on a project she was working on with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). As part of the follow up to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995, each government was asked to translate the Beijing Platform for Action into a governmental action plan. Samia organized workshops and brought together both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and was able to get a detailed view of Palestinian women's status in every sector — health, education, employment, family and personal law — as well as prioritize public policy and legislative recommendations for ensuring equal opportunities for women and men.

Though equipped with a broad view of the needs and the challenges of Palestinian women, Samia was still undecided if she wanted to work with an official institution or an outside government as part of an NGO — again, with an eye of where the most change could be produced. It would take her three months to make a final decision.

In the meantime, she became more knowledgeable about women's peace activism. During her visit in 1995, she had attended a meeting of Jerusalem Link. The coordinating body of two independent women's centers — Bat Shalom in West Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) in East Jerusalem — Jerusalem Link joins Israeli and Palestinian women under the aegis of a set of common political principles, and the group strives to operate as a cooperative model of co-existence between the respective peoples. While operating independently for their own national constituencies, the two organizations advocate for peaceful resolution of the conflict based on the right to self-determination based on a two-state solution with Jerusalem as the joint capital, and “a final settlement of all relevant issues based on international law.”<sup>35</sup>

Now that she was living in the country, she was invited to become a member of the board of directors of the JCW, the Palestinian half of the link. When Samia first joined, the conversation at Jerusalem Link centered on an analysis of the recent Israeli elections and the prospects for peace with Netanyahu elected. In the next years, the group will keep closely apprised of the ongoing peace process and final status negotiations, releasing periodic position statements representative of the collective view of the group.

Over the summer months, Samia was increasingly tempted by and eventually accepted the job in the Department of Gender and Gender and Development. “I had worked in our institutions everywhere in the Diaspora, and now for the first time our institutions were on our own soil. I accepted the position for the power to make change by setting policy and introducing legislation.” The position of gender policies and training director entailed assisting in the establishment of gender departments in each of the different ministries and coordinating their work as a means of mainstreaming women’s issues within the PNA. As all the ministries were still in the process of being formed, Samia was part of creating internal structures, mandates and job descriptions, building the Palestinian government from the ground up.

The hope was that this was state building, although we were unsure because the setbacks of the peace process implementation, and final status talks were off track with Likud in power. It was still clear for me and others that the objective was to create a state, so it is better to start building the institutions now, even if the political context is unclear.

Part of her government work at the time included serving as a member of the PNA Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women (IMCAW), coordinating the different gender focal points of the ministries in implementing the plan of action she had assisted Zahera in drafting the summer before. Receiving special U.N. “train-the-trainers” training in India and Italy, Samia and the committee introduced each ministry to crucial elements in gender budgeting, gender mainstreaming, and gender and development. “We managed to cover all of the departments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, even when it was difficult for those from Gaza to attend the meetings or for us to reach Gaza because of the closures and checkpoints or lack of Israeli permits. Sometimes we conducted our meetings or consultations by phone conference.”

In 1998, Samia was elected by IMCAW as vice chair of the committee, chaired by Intissar al-Wazir, minister of social affairs at the time. Also during that year, she was asked to take charge of the United Nations Department, which was also part of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. She took the job, seeing it as an “opportunity as a woman to be part of the general work of the government and not only on gender.”

On the occasion of the preparation for Beijing +5, IMCAW prepared a comprehensive report on achievements, obstacles and recommendations based on the objectives and strategies adopted in the governmental action plan prepared in 1996. At the request of IMCAW, Abu Ammar invited representatives of IMCAW to present the report in one of the government meetings. Samia presented the major outcomes. Abu Ammar instructed ministers to meet with a delegation of IMCAW to address and discuss the recommendations each in its sector. They considered this an important achievement on the road to gender mainstreaming. Samia also travelled in 2000 to New York to participate in the preparatory meeting of CSW as a representative of official delegation of Palestine.

While the internal work of state building continued, the external work of peacebuilding seemed at a standstill. “During Netanyahu’s time [as prime minister], despite many follow-up meetings to Oslo, no serious negotiations or implementation took place.” As defined in Oslo, by 1999 the interim period was to come to an end with agreement from both sides on a final settlement. Yet, the year was coming to an end without the agreed upon redeployments or the handing over of territory or the freezing of settlement building. Netanyahu was “showing no signs of implementing further.” The process was quickly devolving into a spiral of destruction and retaliation, and the PLO was debating whether to declare unilaterally a Palestinian state.

But in July 1999, elections in Israel took place and Ehud Barak of the Labour Party became prime minister. Running on a platform of reopening negotiations and concluding a peace settlement, his election was viewed as a mandate to commit to the peace process. By mid-July 2000, both Arafat and Barak were at Camp David at the invitation of U.S. President Bill Clinton for a “make or break” summit to tackle final status issues. “It was well known that two final issues were crucial: Jerusalem and refugees. All of the settlements the Israelis were establishing around East Jerusalem demonstrated a policy to create continuously new facts on the ground which further undermined the status of East Jerusalem.”

The talks began on July 11 and broke down by July 26, with mainly the fate of East Jerusalem and its division proving to be the breaking points, including how to allocate sovereignty over the walled Old City and the Noble Sanctuary (Haram al Sharif), which contained the Muslim holy sites of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the presumed underground remains of King Solomon’s and Herod’s temples. “It was clear for the Palestinians that the same old Israeli mentality did not change: what is theirs is theirs and what is ours is also theirs.”

In this general climate and intense focus from both sides, on Sept. 20, 2000, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon visited the Noble Sanctuary. Samia, however, was in Paris on that day, registering Rana for university.

I was watching the television, and I saw Sharon, accompanied by police forces, walking on the Noble Sanctuary, a sacred place to Muslims around the world. He could not have done this without the permission of Barak. I said at the time, “They are either insane or trying to start a war.”

This was the flame that sparked the Second Intifada. On that same day, young men started to throw stones; the soldiers fired back with live bullets. What became known as the al-Aqsa Intifada quickly spread throughout the OPT, and there were demonstrations in the Arab streets and by Palestinians in Israel.

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During the ongoing Second Intifada, the situation on the ground was characterized by massive loss of life, the reoccupation of territories under Palestinian self-rule, military incursions, extrajudicial killings of suspected Palestinian militants, destruction of property, suicide attacks, rocket and mortar fire. Extensive checkpoints and frequent border closings came into practice, drastically reducing the Palestinian standard of living. Interviewed by French radio shortly after the Second Intifada began, Samia was asked by the reporter if she was expecting good things. Her anger

surprised even herself: “We are not expecting good things. They have dragged us from one accord to another, never implementing, renegotiating what we have already negotiated. We just want them out! Out of our villages! Out of our towns! Out of our lives! Out!”

The logistics of living, already difficult, had become virtually impossible. Majed was in his last year of high school in 2000. He carpoled to Jerusalem in a taxi with a yellow flag (reserved to Jerusalem). But the taxi could not always get through security checkpoints; sometimes it wouldn’t show up, and then it stopped altogether. Forced to miss school almost regularly, he completed assignments from home by email. Unable to attend the required labs for the baccalaureate in science, he changed his section to the baccalaureate of literature.

He was an excellent student. I was furious. I had to change my own plans for university because of the 1967 war, and here was my son having to do the same. But Majed convinced us by his logic: ‘Look, I want to graduate this year and with very good notes. I cannot do this by missing classes.’ Majed succeeded in getting his baccalaureate and a scholarship to continue his university study in France.

There were many similar things that Samia recalled from earlier conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

I kept repeating, “This is another 1948. The response of the Israelis was disproportionate to what we were able to do: mass arrests; total bombardments by Apaches [helicopters]; full incursion from the tanks. It was another asymmetrical battle, like in 1948. They started surrounding the towns, cutting them off from their villages — the two depend on each other for goods and services, so even food was difficult to find. They had done this also in Jaffa in 1948.

One day, when the Apaches were hovering over the Bamieh apartment, Samia suddenly found herself again in 1982 Beirut: “I was looking for a wall to separate us from the windows.” Fridays, usually peaceful days for prayer, were the most traumatic.

In Al-Bireh where I live, I would see 600 or more people pass by our house after Friday prayer at the mosque. These were peaceful demonstrators marching to the checkpoints at the entrance of the town. I’d watch them pass by the window. Ten minutes later, I would hear the sirens of police and ambulances. I couldn’t bear it after a point. I’d close the windows and go to sleep. It was the only way for me not to witness the demonstrators, the arrests, the wounded, the dead. Until now I do not find an explanation how I, who usually has difficulty sleeping, was able to sleep. The mind maybe has its mechanisms of self-defense?

After 2000, her job at the U.N. Department also changed dramatically. With closures and restrictions on travel, coordination of donors and the implementation of development activities were difficult. The department shifted from development work to humanitarian assistance to address the loss of jobs due to the deteriorating conditions. Women, in particular, suffered huge unemployment, as the tourist sector took a big blow and small factories closed. With mobility restricted, health and education services had to be decentralized and resources redeployed, so that teachers, students and healthcare staff and patients were assigned to facilities near where they lived. For those in



government, it was a frustrating period, as they saw the negative impact of the occupation on all their previous efforts to structure the mandates and institutions of the ministries.

As the ministries were developing emergency programs, IMCAW developed its own emergency plan to address the impact on women and needed interventions. Women, more than others, were losing jobs and their micro-finance projects, while at the same time there was an increase in women becoming heads of families after the death or arrest of their husbands, fathers or brothers. Healthcare, especially for pregnant women, was urgent; many delivered or lost their babies at checkpoints because of delays or the refusal of passage by Israeli soldiers.

Samia's connection with Jerusalem Link was also complicated during this time. It was difficult to get travel permits from Ramallah to Jerusalem, and she was missing important decisions as a board member. When she could manage to attend, she began to question her place in the group's conversations. Having followed the peace negotiations throughout the years, in 2000 the members were formulating a general statement on how a solution to the refugee problem should proceed in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194, which allowed for return and compensation for lost property. Some of the Israelis expressed resistance to publishing the statement, refusing to discuss refugees or see Israel as responsible for addressing the problem.

I argued, 'How is this not to be discussed? It is the root of this conflict. The Palestinian question emerged because of the refugees; the refugees started the revolution; the First Intifada started in the refugee camps. Unless we solve this problem, the conflict will not end. I am a refugee. I am sitting at the table, recognizing Israel, but at the expense of denying myself the right to reclaim Jaffa. If you are denying the existence of the refugee you are denying my existence. I wonder what I am doing here,' I concluded and left the room.

Shortly after this conversation, and in light of the ever-growing restrictions on mobility, she made the decision to tender her resignation to the board.

In the summer of 2001, the Second Intifada a year old, Samia traveled again to Paris, this time to register Majed for university. She was relieved that his studies would not be interrupted. "I remember telling him, 'Go and finish your studies. Don't worry, we will not declare our freedom and independence while you are away. I am afraid that your generation will still have to do a lot.'" I remember thinking when Oslo was first signed with the five-year interim period, *Oh, my children will be graduating and we will be finalizing the agreement!*

She devoted herself completely to the events surrounding the Intifada. The community was in deep discussion about the best means for resistance. The goal was to pressure the Israelis to end the use of military oppression and implement the political solution of Oslo. It was clear the situation had changed since the First Intifada — the PNA now existed to execute "self-rule" over the Palestinian territories — and the old tools of withholding taxes to the Israelis or setting up strikes and boycotts against them were no longer relevant. New means of non-violent civil disobedience were needed. "There was a discussion at one point of a strike. A strike against whom? We will be striking ourselves!"

The demonstrations continued, and so did the call on the European and international community to engage. Protesters stood in the way of bulldozers, some giving up their lives, to

interrupt demolitions. Boys and young men threw stones. “We had heard in the First Intifada the Israeli charge to ‘Break their bones!’ Now they were using live bullets.” Workshops were held by different groups on how to speak to the press, how to address those on “the other side,” how to relate suffering without falling into a rhetoric of violence and revenge. Other meetings were held to discuss armed resistance versus the use of peaceful means.

But non-violent measures produced no discernible change. Worse yet, there was a growing climate of doubt among Palestinians about whether the Israelis were even interested in peace. “If that is the case, why continue talking about a peace process? The brutality of the Israeli oppressive tactics — destroying an entire village in Gaza because they were looking for a single member of Hamas — helped to fuel this attitude.” Each new settlement undermined any serious effort by the PNA to impose restraint on the Palestinian resistance groups using violence; each incursion of the Israelis served to enflame the support for the approach of Hamas and Jihad. “The military crackdown, the killings and destruction, were creating a feeling of anger stronger than any other force.”

Especially after the Sept. 11, 2001 attack against the U.S., a new discourse began to emerge in the West, and all Palestinian resistance was characterized as terrorism. Within Palestine, voices continued to urge non-violent measures. A statement signed by hundreds of Palestinians was published daily in the newspapers. It condemned suicide bombings against civilians for sacrificing innocents and “glorifying death for death’s sake.”

Reality was reversed, and Barak, followed by Sharon, was saying all Palestinians were the ones inciting the violence. The campaign of the Israeli establishment and some circles of international media portrayed us as terrorists. We were being condemned and punished for the act of one group — the whole of the Palestinian population called terrorists. Yet, they never mentioned state terrorism. How else can you understand the excessive use of force, the destruction of homes and deaths of innocent civilians, if not as state terrorism?

A solidarity campaign in Europe was traveling to the occupied territories to help in hospitals, at demonstrations, setting up human blockades to prevent Israeli attacks and demolitions. In some ways, the “only way to get our voice heard was through this solidarity movement.”

In 2002, in another European initiative by the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) — and specifically on a proposition by Luisa Morgantini, a Member of the European Parliament from Italy — Samia was invited for three months to serve as the Palestinian delegate to the Parliament of the European Union (EUP), headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. She would be accompanied by an Israeli delegate, Debby Lerman, from Women in Black. The goal of the trip was to give alternative voices to help shape European public opinion, raise international awareness about the daily experience of occupation, and mobilize for international intervention and protection.

At that time I felt helpless. There was no reaction from the international community to what was going on, and the conflict was not only continuing but also becoming bloodier. All the demonstrations in Ramallah had one slogan calling for international protection for civilian populations in Palestine. We needed the application of the

fourth Geneva Convention and serious international political engagement to stop the military actions of Israel.

The time was ripe for such voices, especially on the international scene. In March 2002, 20,000 Israeli troops invaded refugee camps in the Gaza Strip and reoccupied most of the West Bank, including Ramallah, laying siege to Arafat's compound for the next five weeks. At least 31 Palestinians were killed and hundreds more ordered out of their homes as part of the operation. Months of curfews and closures followed. Amidst the violence, the U.N. Security Council approved a U.S.-backed resolution endorsing a Palestinian state and calling for an immediate ceasefire in the escalating violence and the resumption of negotiations on a political settlement. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1397 demanded the "immediate cessation of all acts of violence, including acts of terror, provocation, incitement, and destruction." During discussion of the resolution, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan accused Israel of "illegal occupation" of Palestinian land.

Samia and Debby — ready to open the ears of their international audience — arrived in Brussels to a massive demonstration organized by European solidarity movements, calling on the European Union to suspend the association agreement with Israel in accordance with article 2, which calls for the suspension of any Trade Association because of human rights violations, including collective punishment, extrajudicial killings and bombardment of civilians. Samia's and Debby's trip coincided with that of a group of Israeli soldiers who had refused to be deployed to the occupied territories as part of their military service, as well as a delegation from the PLC. "The goal of GUE/NGL in bringing these different delegations together — women, soldiers, legislators — was to redress the misinformation about what was going on."

Another important visit, organized by Luisa Morgatini and Simone Susskind (president of NGO Action for the Mediterranean), was a delegation from Jerusalem Link to the parliament and Belgian institutions and NGOs. They pulled all their resources together to give the delegation wider exposure, including media, to proclaim their demands — though Palestinian and Israeli, spoken as one — concerning the resolution of the conflict: "We jointly ask the international community of states to accept its duty and mandate by international humanitarian law to prevent abuses of an occupying power, by officially intervening to protect the Palestinian people."<sup>36</sup>

At the time, everyone was expecting to see rivalry and conflict between an Israeli and Palestinian. But Debby and Samia spoke in a single voice that the "occupation is killing us all. End the occupation. We need international intervention." They agreed on a carefully crafted message.

First, the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement — a partnership between Europe and the Mediterranean states — created a responsibility for European engagement. We stressed there is no military solution to the conflict. The United Nations has repeatedly stated that the Geneva Convention applies to the occupied territories; international pressure should be used to force Israel to abide by it. We called on the EU to take a stand to stop the Israeli military operation and to bring about a return to political negotiations. We stressed that negotiations were only possible with a third party, and that Europe should play this role.

Besides addressing parliament, they visited the E.U. Commission on Women, the Commission on Human Rights, and state and national governments. After Brussels, they traveled to Italy for a tour organized by Women in Black. To officials, the press and members of civil society,

they always carried the same message: there must be international protection and international intervention to end the occupation to bring about a just peace.

The situation at home continued to worsen and, while still in Europe in April, Debby and Samia learned about the Israeli attack on a refugee camp in Jenin in the northern part of the West Bank. Searching for “armed terrorists,” Israeli forces first bombarded the camp from air and then entered with bulldozers, “razing homes with people still inside.” The media, which had been broadcasting the battle, was suddenly ejected once Israeli forces were in control of the camp. After a lengthy debate, the United Nations established a commission of inquiry, which finally concluded no massacres had taken place during the siege. Many, including Samia, could not understand “what more was needed” to define the methods of the Jenin incursion “a war crime.” In her farewell letter to those she had met as part of the European tour, Samia mentioned the events of Jenin, stressing “my worry is not only for the future of Jenin, but for the fate of international law and its force.”

Shortly after Samia’s return to Ramallah in mid-2002, a sequence of dramatic events unfolded. In June, U.S. President George Bush outlined a timetable for negotiations which would later become the plan known as the “roadmap.”<sup>37</sup> That same month, Israel began the construction of a permanent separation wall in the West Bank, which it said was to prevent attacks inside Israel. The trajectory of the wall incorporated substantial areas east of the Green Line (i.e., in the West Bank), a fact deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice. Samia points out that the wall further deteriorates an already dire standard of living for Palestinians, separating them from hospitals, schools, employment and even their own agricultural land.

Also in September 2002, the Israeli army (for the third time) began a 10-day siege on Arafat’s compound, reducing to rubble most of the buildings surrounding Al Muqataa (headquarters of the PNA and the compound where Arafat lived and worked). With Israeli bulldozers destroying the compound, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets, drumming on pots and pans, continuing into the night despite the curfew. International media captured it all for print and television. “We were not living far from the compound and could hear the voices of the crowd, the helicopters, the bulldozers.”

International outrage escalated with the destruction; under such pressure, the Israeli army desisted from the total destruction of the compound, trapping those still in the building — including Arafat — in a room on the second floor, assuming he would surrender to save his life. But Samia remembers that Arafat refused to leave the building, choosing instead to withstand the prolonged standoff. With the Israelis promising that he would be arrested and expelled if he left the building, the only way Arafat could leave the building was to leave Palestine. In a show of defiance, Arafat continued running the PNA from the small section of compound that still stood. He could not move in the country, so the people from everywhere came to him — not only Palestinians but the solidarity movement, Israeli peace activists and an official European delegation too. He would remain under virtual house arrest in the compound until his death in 2004.<sup>38</sup>

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After her trip to the European parliament, Samia was convinced that working in partnership with European institutions was key to bringing the situation back to political focus. At the time, the Planning Ministry and Foreign Affairs were being restructured into two separate entities, and as the work of the U.N. Department focused mostly on development cooperation, it was placed in the

Planning Ministry. Because of her extensive international work and her assessment of the essential role of Europe in the region and the conflict, Samia joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the head of the European Affairs Department, dealing with the E.U. and its institutions as well as the bilateral relations between the PNA and each of the 22 European countries that then made up the union.

Samia worked under the minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nabeel Ali Shaath. “I learned a lot about what diplomacy is about, working so closely with a man of his caliber.” Dr. Nabeel also chaired the Constitution Committee, of which Samia served as a member of the consultative committee. The group released a draft of the Palestinian constitution in March of 2003. Having worked in policy for so long, Samia knew the importance of meticulously reviewing every draft, as even the smallest detail can have wide ramifications. “In working on citizenship, the wording first stated it be transmitted by father *or* mother. I insisted it be changed to father *and* mother. The two have a very different meaning.”

Zahera was on the committee, representing the Department of Gender, and together she and Samia conducted consultations with women NGOs and used CEDAW to institutionalize in the constitution women’s right to equal opportunity. Although Samia would have preferred a purely democratic secular state (“better to separate the law of the world with the law of the heavens”), the Sharia is “named as one of the sources, but not the exclusive source” of legislation. “The moderate interpretation of the Sharia provides women a lot of rights, but women must be willing and able to exercise these rights.”<sup>39</sup>

Her work directing the European Affairs unit entailed meeting with diplomats on behalf of the PNA, and attending the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership meetings, which included all the EU countries and those with coastlines on the Mediterranean Sea. Held twice yearly, Samia attended the meetings as a senior level delegate of the ministry. She attributes this experience to helping her develop skills in negotiation, which were of great use in finalizing the meeting agendas and outcome documents in which every word was reviewed, contested, negotiated and reviewed again. “This was a great experience for my political maturity — from activist to politician. I learned that politics is not only about principles, but also about interests.”

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In July 2003 a group of Palestinian women reached across the border to Israeli women in the hopes of finding common ground. Their efforts would eventually lead to the development of the International Women’s Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC), created under the auspices of UNIFEM and based on the principles of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 (unanimously adopted in October 2000) concerning women’s vital role in peace and negotiation processes.

Intrigued by women’s contributions to resolving the conflicts in Northern Ireland and South Africa, Palestinian women first approached Israeli women in Jerusalem Link about the idea. A concept paper was drafted, and after an extensive process of discussion and consultations, the group approached Noleen Heyzer, executive director of UNIFEM, to chair a meeting with Palestinian, Israeli and international women on resolution 1325 in Istanbul, Turkey in 2005. At the end of the four-day meeting, a charter and principles were agreed upon and the group announced its creation as the IWC. Samia is a founding member and chair of the Palestinian Steering Committee.

IWC functions as an active policy analysis, advisory and lobbying commission and is not a dialogue group. As the concrete implementation of resolution 1325, IWC strives to ensure the meaningful involvement of women at all levels in the establishment of a just and durable Palestinian-Israeli peace based on international law, human rights and equality. In this effort, IWC has called for the end of occupation, immediate final status negotiations and a sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

IWC is a deliberative structure of 20 Palestinian women, 20 Israeli women and 15 international women; the members include parliamentary representatives, present and former ministers, political party leaders and civil society leaders; all have experience in diplomatic and political negotiations. The international membership is a model for how the larger international community can actively engage in solving the conflict — an indispensable element in the success of any peace plan, Samia insists. The group emphasizes consensus, transparency and accountability, always speaking in a single, unified voice without compromising the foundational objectives and principles. “We see this as specifically a model for women’s decision making.” And indeed, the IWC charter calls for the rectification of Palestinian and Israeli women’s absence in decision-making processes and official peace negotiations. Women have earned this space at the table through their significant contributions over the years in developing alternative models of political dialogue and engaging in peacemaking efforts.

We have a common vision: End the conflict on the basis of justice and dignity for all. But we are not a closed commission, only trying to increase the knowledge and power of the IWC members. No. For me, the real challenge facing the IWC is not only how to bring women and women’s perspective to the negotiating table, but also and mainly how much the objectives of IWC are spreading among bigger numbers of women from both sides. The second challenge is the most important one to be met, and necessary for meeting the first objective. Our priority must be to enlarge our constituency. To the extent we can spread our vision and women’s perspective so they are part of the public debate among both men and women, we as women will have played a very important role in reconciliation.

Soon after its creation, the IWC met with the roadmap quartet members. An IWC delegation visited the European Parliament and then the U.S. State Department and members of the U.S. Congress. The following year, Heyzer arranged for an IWC delegation to attend the opening meeting of the U.N. General Assembly and meet with senior officials and foreign ministers. As part of the trip, the group met with the Secretary General of the Arab League, receiving its endorsement and in turn endorsing the Arab Initiative as a framework for comprehensive peace in the region.

Closer to home, the Israeli Knesset endorsed resolution 1325 and Palestinian President Abbas promulgated a presidential decree in support of the resolution, calling all departments, especially those involved in negotiations, to include women in decision making and take their perspectives, experiences and needs into account. “At the time, in light of the harsh military measures of the Israeli authorities, plus the construction of the wall and expansion of the settlements, the Palestinians were not in the mood for cooperation with Israelis, so President Abbas’ endorsement was very important.”

On May 13, 2006, in the presence of Heyzer and international members, IWC held a conference in East Jerusalem. Called “A Place at the Table,” the conference was attended by more than 300 participants, including many members of the diplomatic corps for the PNA and Israel. The end statement called for an inclusive and transparent negotiation. Despite its success, it is doubtful such a meeting will be held again. Restrictions on mobility and constrictive permitting — what Samia calls “a system without a system” — makes meetings even for the core IWC members difficult. “Our vision to work together is suffering, and our objective to spread our vision on the ground is suffering.”

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Arafat passed away at the age of 74 in 2004. He had devoted his life to leading the Palestinian revolution from one stage to the next, Samia says, working to negotiate a settlement with Israel that “did not mean the surrender of our legitimate rights.” It was the end of an era, and even critics of Arafat wondered who could replace such a formidable leader.

One of the last remaining members of the old guard and approved by Arab and internationals, Mahmoud Abbas was nominated by Fatah and won the election based on a platform of resuming negotiations for fulfilling the rights of statehood and self-determination of the Palestinian people. His win in the election “gave a signal of how eager the people are for a political solution to end occupation so they can begin living in peace and develop their state.”

After the presidential election, the date was set for elections to the PLC and municipal councils. Women’s associations mobilized to introduce a quota system into law. Utilizing an extensive lobbying and media campaign, the coalition was successful in getting the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) to adopt a municipal quota of at least two women to seats on each council. The push helped to mobilize women as candidates and voters and to influence public opinion about the need for women’s representation in leadership.

Women went to vote in large numbers, and 500 women ran for seats on 350 municipal councils. Most of the women succeeded due to the quota, but some won their elections by votes alone. In three municipalities, two women were elected mayors of the council, with one of these women having the highest number of votes for all candidates, men or women.

The elections were historic for the number of women holding elected office and serving as mayors. In the past, municipal seats had been appointed, with very few given to women. The elections demonstrated that, when given the chance, the public was ready to support women’s leadership.

Spurred by the success of the quota on the municipal level, women’s groups pushed for a similar affirmative action measure for PLC elections. The new law stipulated the placement of women candidates on party election lists: at least one woman must be in the first three names listed; at least one woman in the next five names on the list; then again the next five names, and so on. The quota had an immediate impact: In the 2006 elections, women took 17 of the 132 seats in the PLC, as compared to five out of 88 seats in the 1996 elections. The Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), of which Samia is a member, partnered with other women NGOs to conduct training for women candidates at both the municipal and national level; the training continued for

those who won their elections, so not only women's numbers but their capacity was enhanced as elected officials.

The 2006 election was a victory for women, but also a new challenge — for the women's movement and the Palestinian National Authority — in which a Hamas-controlled government is creating internal and external dilemmas. “For the first time in our history, Palestinians are divided among themselves.” Soon after the election, the roadmap quartet issued a statement that unless Hamas meets certain conditions it will not be recognized, disrupting the normalization process between the PNA and Israel. Shortly afterward, the E.U. followed up by suspending its aid to the Palestinian government. Soon there was no money to pay the PNA civil servants. Eventually, and in the Gaza Strip in particular, the loss of aid, the closures, the sieges, the ring of Israeli forces surrounding the entirety of the territory provoked a humanitarian crisis.

The women's movement also has experienced a split on approach and principles because of the new Palestinian government. While the majority of Palestinian feminists maintain a secular approach, some argue that common ground should be found with Hamas, prioritizing the national movement over women's issues. A delegation of women met with the Hamas-appointed head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs to ask what approach she would take to advance women's status. It was clear that the ministry would shift its focus from policy to services, and it was evident “we had difference in our understanding of the rights of women and equality. After meeting, cooperation did not seem possible.” In its recent strategic planning session for 2007, the WATC committed to reinforcing its vision by creating an explicit feminist discourse: “We need to promote a clear message that our aim is to work toward a democratic society that respects women's human rights and equality, using as terms of reference the Palestinian Declaration of Independence and international law.”

But after 30 years of service to the PLO and then PNA — more than 10 of those years contributing to efforts to build the institutions of the future Palestinian state — Samia left the ministry in July of 2007 and into early retirement. In reply to her farewell letter, she received from some of her foreign colleagues messages of thanks for her frankness, transparency and negotiating skills, and her efforts in improving relations between Palestine and European countries.

Today, Samia says, she is fighting on two fronts: one internal and one external to the territory. One reason she left the ministry in 2007 was because of this internal struggle within Palestine: no longer recognizing a place for herself in the Hamas-controlled government's political or social program. The PNA government will continue efforts to make the parties more closely accountable to the democratic secular state as envisioned in the constitution. Yet, Samia asks, “is it possible to build a nation under occupation? The world acts as though we have our state, and we operate as though we have our government, but we remain under the control of Israel.” The 2006 elections, Samia believes, were a reflection of Palestinian frustration with this situation. She remembers a time in her own life when Israel had no human face: “They were the phantoms bombing us, linked in our memory to the Nakba, a military machine.” Yet, despite the “realities of life under occupation, the loss of their land and loved ones, the restrictions on mobility with permits, closures, the wall — Palestinians are still trying to find bridges to the other.”

Israel is the partner in this endeavor: “Israel has its state. It comes to the peace table in a position of power.” And the international community must play its part: “International law is only as strong as the international community's willingness to enforce it.”



If the situation continues as it is going, Samia says, “I am afraid the other again will have no human face.” Yet Samia keeps working, despite all the dead ends.

You cannot resign from your struggle for freedom. Failure is not an option. We owe to our generation and more to our children’s generation to continue to uphold all the values we spent our lives for. We owe to them and offer them a support system and lessons learned, since they are the ones to continue the pursuit of freedom, liberty and human dignity.

**BIOGRAPHY OF A PEACE WRITER —**  
**THERESA DE LANGIS**

Theresa de Langis is the immediate past executive director of the New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women (NHCSW). She is the author of numerous publications, including "Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide: The History of Zonta International, 1919-1999," "Double Jeopardy: A Report on the Training and Educational Programs for NH's Female Offenders" and "Share Your Story," based on listening sessions with women on welfare. de Langis served as the managing editor of "The Legal Handbook for Women in New Hampshire," and oversaw its translation into Spanish. During the 2006 legislative session, she drafted and – in partnership with NHCSW, legislators and community stakeholders – successfully advocated for the passage of a law to address long-standing gender inequities in the state's criminal justice system. de Langis holds a doctoral degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago and is an adjunct faculty member of the University of New Hampshire.

## **JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE**

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to "not only talk about peace, but make peace." The IPJ offers its services to parties in conflict to provide mediation and facilitation, assessments, training and consultations. It advances peace with justice through work with members of civil society in zones of conflict and has a focus on mainstreaming women in peace processes.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Country programs, such as the Nepal Project, offer wide-ranging conflict assessments, mediation and conflict resolution training workshops.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

## **UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article “‘Women Cannot Cry Anymore’: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

<sup>2</sup> Author’s note: The narrative that follows is based on eight weeks of interviews conducted with Samia Bamieh in the fall of 2007. It is meant to authentically and fully express in English (versus Arabic or French, Samia’s primary languages) the experience, analysis and perspective of Samia Bamieh alone and not that of the author or any others. In writing the narrative, the author has worked to capture the voice, tone and rhythm of Samia, although liberty has been taken in eliminating repetitions and regularizing grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary.

<sup>3</sup> According to the mandate system, as described in the Covenant of the League of Nations, “peoples not yet able to stand by themselves” would be administered by “advanced nations” and in time, these powers would transfer authority to the local population.

<sup>4</sup> The Balfour Declaration was an official statement in the form of a letter addressed to Lord Rothschild, a leading Zionist figure in Britain, from Lord Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Secretary.

<sup>5</sup> François Massoulie, *Middle East Conflicts*, trans. Angela Parker (New York: Interlink Publishing Group, 2003), 25-6.

<sup>6</sup> Without Palestinian consent, the Jewish population more than doubled under the policies of the British mandate — between 1922 and 1948 — increasing from 10 to 30 percent of the total population in Palestine.

<sup>7</sup> Israel’s “New Historians,” such as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé and Simha Flapan, revisited the official Zionist history, basing their findings on declassified Israeli wartime archives in the late 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> The part of Jerusalem occupied by the Israelis would become known as West Jerusalem.

<sup>9</sup> According to a United Nations Web site, “over half of the indigenous Palestinian population fled or were expelled.” [www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo/history.html](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo/history.html). The majority of refugees have been living in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency was established in 1949; in 1951 its list of registered refugees was 950,000.

<sup>10</sup> Massoulie, 68.

<sup>11</sup> When Samia’s mother passed away many years later, her daughter’s school composition was still preserved among the family’s treasured papers.

<sup>12</sup> Later, Samia, when she became a mother herself, discovered that she had clashed with her mother because they had too much in common. As for father, he ended his life proud of all of his children, as each in one way or another had been committed to the national Palestinian movement.

<sup>13</sup> Massoulie, 52. Also see Walid al-Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> The family traces its roots in Palestine to the seventh century.

<sup>15</sup> “After my father died, I kept some of his belongings, including a photo of him on his horse, a beautiful white horse, and some of the letters from that period: one he addressed to the Arab League for establishing a fund for Palestine, another one he received from the national committee of resistance in the village of Salma.”

<sup>16</sup> In Resolution 237 of June 14, 1967, the U.N. Security Council called upon Israel to ensure the safety of inhabitants and “to facilitate the return of those inhabitants who had fled the areas since the outbreak of hostilities.” U.N. Security

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Council Resolution 242 of Nov. 22, 1967, emphasized “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and requested the withdrawal of Israel from territory it occupied in the 1967 war.

<sup>17</sup> Despite the transfer of some authority to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) after Oslo, the population registry of Palestinians was still in the hands of Israeli authorities who determine who is allowed to enter or not enter the OPT, to live there or not, and in which area to live. For example, Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank cannot enter East Jerusalem, or those living in the West Bank need an Israeli permit to enter Gaza, or vice versa.

<sup>18</sup> On March 21, 1968, Israeli forces attacked a Palestinian base of the Fedaiyeen in the village of Al-Karameh in Jordan. The Palestinians were backed by the Jordanians, and for the first time in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israeli forces had to withdraw. The Battle of Al-Karameh brought about the large-scale support of Arab people and was the starting point for the large enrollment of Palestinians, Arabs and even some in the international community to the Palestinian national movement. On March 24, the U.N. Security Council adopted resolution 248, condemning the large-scale and premeditated military actions by Israel against Jordan.

<sup>19</sup> Samia says now, “It was only 26 years later that I really took my revenge of this humiliation. Passing over the same bridge after the Oslo Accords, I sent a woman Israeli soldier out of the search room, telling her that under the accords, it is only a Palestinian policewoman who had the responsibility to do it.”

<sup>20</sup> With the 1948 war and the armistice lines defined between Egypt and Israel, the territory of the Gaza Strip shrank to 360 square kilometers, slightly more than twice the size of Washington, D.C. It suffered from influxes of refugees, mainly from the Jaffa and Beersheva districts. It now has one of the highest population densities in the world, home to 1.5 million people, of which 500,000 are refugees.

<sup>21</sup> Samia remarks, “The embroidered Palestinian dresses, jackets and shawls became part of our identity. Palestinian women wear them in international conferences and other occasions.”

<sup>22</sup> Today, they number 1 million and a half, and pursue their struggle for equal citizenship and for their cultural and political rights as a minority of non-Jewish citizens. By contrast, Israeli citizens returned to their villages inside what became part of Israel.

<sup>23</sup> She says today of their 37-year marriage, “He has been a companion for my activism.”

<sup>24</sup> Later in life, Samia will be among those who advocate for a civil family law.

<sup>25</sup> Abu Omar (Hanna Mikhail) was a Palestinian Christian from Ramallah and had a Ph.D. from Harvard. From 1972 to 1974 he led students, women and various segments of the movement in Beirut. In 1976 he disappeared while sailing on a mission in a small boat between Beirut and Tripoli in northern Lebanon. The sea was constantly patrolled by Israelis and Phalangists. His body was never found.

<sup>26</sup> At the time, Aden was part of South Yemen, also known as Yemen (Aden). The names Aden and Yemen are used interchangeably.

<sup>27</sup> Samia remarks, I will return to Lebanon 22 years later, as part of a Palestinian delegation to an ESCAW regional meeting in preparation of Beijing +10. In this quick visit, I put an end finally — as one of my friends said — to my mourning of Beirut and Lebanon.”

<sup>28</sup> Yemen was just another example. In 1905 the British and Ottoman Empires concluded an agreement fixing boundaries between what will be known as the north and the south. Aden was of strategic importance for the British, an important port on the route to India. After 1956, Aden had the the first British military base in the region. South Yemen acceded to its independence in 1967, under the ruling of the national liberation front. North Yemen was independent after the end of the WWI and moved from a monarchy to a republic.

<sup>29</sup> Yasser Arafat. It was customary to take a revolutionary name when joining the movement, both for security reasons and to signal a new identity as a freedom fighter (either with arms or as a political activist). “Abu” means father in Arabic. Men usually are called by their eldest son’s name.

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<sup>30</sup> When both parts of Yemen united in 1990, my thoughts went to the Yemenite women, wondering what would prevail: the advanced legislation of the south and the advancement of the conditions of the women in the united Yemen, or the other way around.

<sup>31</sup> Abu Jihad was also responsible in its central committee for the OPT affairs. He had focused since 1982 on defining new strategies, building particularly the Fatah youth organization in the OPT, which became the backbone of the Intifada.

<sup>32</sup> All quotations from the Palestinian Declaration of Independence taken from <http://electronicintifada.net/bytopic/historicaldocuments/printer59.shtml>.

<sup>33</sup> All quotations about the conference found in the Final Document of the Women's Dialogue. [www.wilpf.int.ch/publications/2000middleeast1930.htm](http://www.wilpf.int.ch/publications/2000middleeast1930.htm)

<sup>34</sup> From the Marrakech Declaration, May 29, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> [www.j-c-w.org/jl\\_principles.php](http://www.j-c-w.org/jl_principles.php) and [www.batshalom.org/jlink\\_about.php](http://www.batshalom.org/jlink_about.php).

<sup>36</sup> [www.j-c-w.org/joint\\_declarations.php?id=3](http://www.j-c-w.org/joint_declarations.php?id=3) and [www.batshalom.org/jlink\\_declaration.php](http://www.batshalom.org/jlink_declaration.php).

<sup>37</sup> The road map of 2003 had been developed by a “quartet of international entities” — the U.S., E.U., Russia and the United Nations — and was endorsed by U.N. Security Resolution 1515. Based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), the plan aimed at a three-staged final settlement of the conflict by 2005, with the objective of establishing two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The plan outlines steps to normalize relations, requiring the Palestinian Authority to make democratic reforms and abandon the use of terrorism, and Israel to accept a reformed Palestinian government and end settlement activity. The road map differed from previous peace plans in significant ways, but like the plans that preceded it, it has not brought peace.

<sup>38</sup> His health quickly deteriorated. Transported in urgency to a French hospital in November 2004, Arafat died on November 11 from “an unknown disease.” Samia recalls, “His funeral in Ramallah was unforgettable. When the helicopter bringing him back was over the Moukataa, the crowd of people — thousands and thousands gathered outside — invaded the Moukataa. No one could stop them. They took hold of his coffin which was passing from hands to hands until brought to the spot where he was to be buried. Youth from East Jerusalem brought sand from Haram Al-Sharif where he wished to be buried, and made a solemn promise that some day they will move him to Al-Haram.”

<sup>39</sup> Samia points to Morocco as a model in which Sharia is interpreted in a very progressive way.