



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, 1975---

WOMEN OF PALESTINE

The life of a Palestinian woman is full of the cruelest experiences of man's inhumanity to man ... the loss of her home, loved ones, and the rearing of her children as refugees. Few studies have been written or surveys taken to reveal the factual details of her life. She will not be represented in her own right at international gatherings commemorating 1975 as International Women's Year. Yet her experiences are among the most profound of women anywhere in the world. The following are the words of Palestinian refugee women, telling of those experiences:

My father died in 1948. They killed him in our house. Some bullets came from outside. They took him to the hospital for three or four days and then he died. I was four years old and I had a brother who was only three days old*

I was eight months pregnant when the war (of 1973) broke out and we had to start running. But while I was running I was too frightened to think of the pain. I had all the children with me, and one of the girls kept fainting from terror. She has not been the same since. I walked to Damascus and immediately upon arrival I had my baby. Still, I hope to be back by the summer, even though at the moment, I do not know whether my house is standing or not. I also lost a sister and an uncle in the shelling**

The feeling of being Palestinian is born with them (the children) and grows with them. A girl 6 years old can talk about Palestine as if she had lived there. If children in the camps are asked where they are from, they often name their parents' villages in Palestine***

For an American woman it is as simple as this. Would she like to be displaced from her house and be thrown out, for somebody to come and live in her house? Would she accept this fact? I don't think she would. Our case is as simple as this. We were thrown out of our houses, our country; we want back our country. We want to live in our country*

There are various types of pressure, some direct and some indirect. Immediately after the 1967 war, the direct was more evident in Bethlehem. Israeli loudspeakers told us we had two hours to evacuate before the town was destroyed. Some people left. (But) We had learned the lesson of 1948. Our family decided to stay whatever happened. There are indirect pressures: many families have been separated. Often the head of a family is not allowed to come back (to his family in the Occupied Territories)*

The orange groves were there before the Jews came, you see. Before I was born my father had two orange groves, and they exported 23 million boxes in 1948 from Jaffa. The (Israeli) tour conductor kept talking about these orange groves that the Israelis had planted since 1948. They (the tourists) were going through the Jaffa area to Jerusalem. Fortunately, there was a little American lady on the bus. And she sat in the back of the bus, you know, and the tour conductor went on to talk about the great achievements of the Israelis in orange planting and all that, and she said: Nonsense, that orange grove is certainly older than 20 years*

Before 1948 we did not hate the Jews. I still don't hate the Jews. I hate what Zionism is doing to my people and to the Jewish people One Jewish doctor, with whom I worked in the government hospital until 1948, came to look me up after (the war of) 1967. I was very frank. I told him he could either have our friendship or our land, but not both I never saw him again. My people have suffered too much: my sons, my husband, my parents, who died in exile in Amman when they had such a beautiful home in the New City's Talblyeh quarter (of Jerusalem). The injustice of it; the ugliness of it. And yet, once we lived as friends****

**The Link*, September/October, 1974; material collected by Frank H. Epp and John Goddard; excerpts from their book, *The Palestinians: A Portrait in 1975*, to be published in Canada in 1976.

***The Daily Star*, Beirut, February 3, 1974, page 7, article by Kathleen Phipps.

****The New York Times*, May 18, 1973, pages 1 & 2.

****"The Dilemma of Jerusalem" by Lawrence Mosher, *National Observer*, April 20, 1974; these are the words of Dr. Salwa Khuri-Otaqui, the first Palestinian woman to become a physician. She is Protestant, has two grown sons, and was widowed in 1969.



BAQA 'A REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN—(Excerpts from "Troubled Dreams for Refugees" by George Wilson, *The Washington Post*, 12/16/73, pg. B3; UNRWA photo by George Nehmeh) "She somehow radiated pride, dignity, determination and even honor as she stood in the crowd at the refugee camp clinic waiting for the doctor to look at her child. Amneh Mahmoud, 30, born in a tranquil Arab farm village and then uprooted as a child to spend the rest of her life up to now in refugee camps, held her daughter, Fatmeh, in her arms as she spoke of the dream that has kept her going all that time. 'Palestine,' she said with dark eyes glistening. 'Who does not want to go back to Palestine? Who would not like to go back to her home village?' ... she led us deep inside the Baqa'a refugee camp to her home—two 11 by 12 foot huts, one built from cement blocks and the other from corrugated metal. Mercifully, both dwellings had cement floors. Even though 9 people lived together in the tiny space, the children's mattresses were rolled up neatly along the wall; the pots and pans were stacked in one corner, and the floor space between the family's belongings was swept clean. 'If it were later in the day,' Mrs. Mahmoud said through the Palestinian translator, 'I would cook dinner for you.' Never mind that such a meal would involve hauling water from the community spigot, cooking over a kerosene or wood fire and using up precious food. Her home and others at the camp have no electricity, of course, and there is no iceman. So keeping food cold and germ-free is impossible—a situation that leads to much of the sickness here, especially among the young ... With the death of every child; with every night of hunger; with every new humiliation of the homeless; with each wave of homesickness for her relatives she has not seen for years—this dream of going home to Palestine could not help getting rosier..."

MOSLEM WOMEN

For a Palestinian woman who is Moslem, Islamic law recognizes her as having a legal identity which continues to exist even though she should marry. A Moslem woman generally keeps her maiden name after marriage for all legal, professional, and social purposes. As noted in a pamphlet compiled by NAJDA, "her name given at birth remains her name through life, changed only by the title *Sayida* (Mrs.) upon marriage."

Islamic law also recognizes a woman's legal right to own property and to dispose of it at her own discretion. Legally, she also has the right to undertake trade, commerce, engage in any profession, and sue others in court without having to secure her husband's approval.



NABATIEH REFUGEE CAMP, SOUTH LEBANON (UNRWA photo by Jack Madvo)—Fatmeh Diab Mohammed, now 55, left Khalsa, Palestine in 1948 where she and her husband had farmed their own land. After losing everything, they came to Lebanon with their three children and settled first in Tibeh, then in Mazra'et Haboush. Eventually they moved to Nabatieh Camp where they opened a small shop. Two more children were born. With the little money they earned, they were able to send one of their sons to medical school. On May 16, 1974, Fatmeh's husband was killed during an Israeli raid on the camp; her home was completely destroyed and her youngest son injured.

SALUTE TO WOMEN

Women have been responsible for the creation and maintenance of hospitals, schools/orphanages, and community development projects which are significant among ANERA-assisted programs. In honor of International Women's Year, ANERA salutes all the women who have made these programs successful. Special recognition goes to the following:

Hospitals: the late **Katherine Siksek**, founder, and her daughter, **Henrietta Siksek Farradj**, director, Four Homes of Mercy, Bethany, West Bank; the late **Bertha Spafford Vester**, founder, and **Anna Grace Lind**, Director, Spafford Children's Center, Jerusalem, West Bank.

Schools/Orphanages: **Hind Husselni**, President, Dar El Tifl, Jerusalem, West Bank; **Elizabeth Nasir**, founder and director, Rawdat El-Zuhur, Jerusalem, West Bank; **Alice B. Sahhar**, co-founder and director, Jeel Al-Amal, Bethany, West Bank.

Community Development Projects: **Hajja Andalib Amad**, director, Arab Women's Union, Nablus, West Bank; **Yusra Barbari**, founder and director, Palestine Women's Union, Gaza; **Charmine Hneineh**, Association for the Resurgence of Palestinian Camps, Lebanon; **Sameeha Saleme Khailil**, President, Society of In'ash El-Uhra, Bireh, West Bank; **Zahia Nashashibi**, director, Arab Women's Society, Jerusalem, West Bank; **Doris Salah**, Director, YWCA, Jerusalem, West Bank; **Zlikha Shehabi**, director, Arab Women's Union, Jerusalem, West Bank.

PALESTINIAN WOMEN HELP EACH OTHER

Unique among ANERA-assisted programs are those community development enterprises organized by women for women. In their programs, the women have combined the functions of charitable organizations with those of small businesses and cooperatives. Such organizations include: **the Society of In'ash El-Usra, YWCA of East Jerusalem, Palestine Women's Union of Gaza, Arab Women's Unions of Nablus and Jerusalem, Arab Women's Society of Jerusalem, and the Association for the Resurgence of Palestinian Camps.** Over the past seven years, ANERA has contributed \$46,500 to these community development projects, all but one located in the Occupied Territories.

After the political erasure of Palestine in 1948, the need for refugee aid was critical. Women obtained donations of money, land, and buildings for refugee operations—all of this under the most adverse circumstances within a population facing economic hardship and, after 1967, living under military occupation. The resourcefulness and ingenuity of these women—all but a few of them Palestinians them-

selves—cannot be overemphasized.

The goals of these organizations are perhaps best summarized in the objectives established by the Palestine Women's Union in Gaza:

1. To raise the social, cultural, health, and economic standards of women;
2. To promote and patronize honourable life for needy women and orphans;
3. To care for mothers and children;
4. To look after working women and to achieve equality with men in public life;
5. To take care of patients and their families;

Depending both on volunteer help and on paid staffs, the groups now maintain and manage their own schools, libraries, vocational training programs for women, medical clinics and health care programs, social and cultural programs, and provide aid to the needy which includes financial assistance, medical care, and material items. Their work literally benefits thousands of Palestinians—one of the medical clinics, for example, sees as

many as 3,000 children per day.

These Palestinian women early recognized a need to develop a regular source of income for their organizations and a market for the goods produced by the women trained in their programs. Consequently, shops were established to sell the needlework and weaving for which Palestinian women are famous. Food stores were also set up where women could sell their own products such as jams, pickles, cakes and biscuits.

In addition, to their regular operations, each enterprise has its own unique programs. For example, the Society of In'ash El-Usra owns and operates a beauty parlor and a shirt and pajama factory; the income earned by those working in these businesses helps support 30 families. The Arab Women's Union of Jerusalem owns seven small apartments which they rent to tourists as a source of income. The Arab Women's Union of Nablus has a special school for the blind. The Association for the Resurgence of Palestinian Camps in Lebanon has organized Palestinian Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops in refugee camps there.

WOMEN IN THE CAMPS

Unlike women who have national identities, little documented information exists about Palestinian refugee women. However, in a recent article appearing in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Winter, 1975, page 104), Bassem Sirhan notes: "The situation of Palestinian women in the (refugee) camp communities is similar to that of women in most Arab countries. The idea of a woman's role as being to stay at home and attend to her menfolk is still prevalent. Women are brought up for marriage, and are extremely limited in their social relationships with others. Single girls are not allowed to go out alone or with boys and traditional values which vest family honour in female sexual purity still apply. When they marry the girls' parents usually play a major role in the choice of the husband... There has been movement in the direction of change in some aspects of a woman's life... It has become more respectable for women to participate in the political and even military struggle, ... increasing numbers of women and girls in the camps are demanding the right to education and to work..."



RAMALLAH, WEST BANK—Miriam Bajalia, a Palestinian refugee, is shown here with four of her children. Apart from the rations she receives from UNRWA, she relies entirely upon her earnings as a seamstress to support her family. She is shown here at work upon a tablecloth, 15 feet long, which took her more than a year to complete.

Enclosed is a contribution to be used for Palestinian women.

\$15 _____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ Other \$ _____

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Please send the above with your tax-deductible contribution to ANERA, 733 15th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Checks should be made payable to ANERA. Thank you for your help.



Palestinians are generally considered to be among the best educated people in the Middle East. However, the chances for Palestinian women to be educated fall far below those of Palestinian men. For example, during the academic year of 1973-74, university scholarships provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinians totaled 370. Of these 370 students, only 36 were women. Interestingly, 72% of these women were studying traditionally male professions—21 studying to become medical doctors and 5 studying to become engineers. This photo by Sue Herrick shows two young Palestinian women conducting a physics experiment at the UNRWA Training Center near Amman, Jordan.

NAJDA is a national women's organization for American women concerned about the Middle East. NAJDA sponsors various programs which focus on the real problems of cross-cultural understanding between Arab and American. NAJDA's monthly newsletter is unusually interesting, containing valuable facts about the Middle East, past and present, which are not readily available elsewhere. The President of NAJDA is Kathleen Nimr and the Newsletter Editor is Audrey Shabbas. Regular Membership in NAJDA is \$7; Supporting Membership is \$17. Further information may be ob-

tained by Writing: NAJDA, Box 6051, Albany, California 94706.

In 1971, the Organization of the League of Arab States established the Commission on the Status of Arab Women. The Commission's main purposes include "the elimination of discrimination against women and the realization of the equality of men and women in all spheres of life." Information on the work of the Commission may be obtained by writing: The League of Arab States, Arab Information Center, 747 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017

WOMEN IN PRISON

From *The Daily Star*, Beirut, March 12, 1975:

"... Lutfiya Hawary, a thirty-year-old Palestinian woman, ... has spent 6 years in an Israeli prison in Ramleh on the West Bank ... A poetess and high school teacher, Lutfiya was arrested six different times for her role in resisting the Israeli occupation ... no specific charges were brought against her on the first five occasions, and on the last ... (she was) framed when Israeli agents planted explosive material in her living quarters ... Lutfiya is currently suffering from anemia, five slipped discs in the vertebral column, chronic pains in the stomach and intestines, inflammation in the respiratory tracts, and inflammation in the gums since her teeth were broken during interrogation.

Shortly after her release, Lutfiya traveled to Geneva to testify before the U.N. International Investigation Commission on Human Rights. "I am going against the advice of my doctors, who want me to undergo treatment which could take up to two years. But I can't go to the hospital before doing everything possible to expose the plight of my imprisoned comrades ..."

There are at least five Palestinian women now imprisoned by the Israelis in Ramleh prison: Fatmeh Birnaweh, Miriam Shaksheer, Aisha Audeh, Rasmiya Audeh, and Afifa (from Khalil). Most of these women are not yet thirty years old and are serving life sentences for their political beliefs.



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