

Chapter 1

THREE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN LEADERS

I.

A remark Eishah Odeh made at the end of our interview in 1991 best sums this background portrait of the Palestinian women's leadership. Odeh's history of involvement and her credentials in the Palestinian National Movement are impeccable. She is a former freedom fighter who had spent ten years in Israeli prison and had earned a seat in the Political Bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She is also among the few women in the Palestinian movement who are considered bona fide "heroes of the revolution."¹ Odeh, however, came across as self-effacing, but it was from humility not lack of confidence. Odeh was responding to my statement that I thought of the Palestinian women's leadership as "daughters of the PLO."

What drew me to the word "daughters" was its strong sound in English and its common usage in works about women in nationalist and revolutionary movements—as in the study of Nicaraguan women, *Daughters of Sandino*, by Margaret Randall, and in the work about Indian women, *Daughters of Independence*, by Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi; and, of course, *Daughters of the American Revolution*, referring to female descendants of people who participated in the revolution against British colonialism. Odeh had crisply informed me that "daughters of the PLO" was not a suitable term and her eyes expected me to know why. I didn't at the time. Not until sifting through the details I had collected about the early history of these thirty-four women did I grasp what Odeh had meant.

In Arabic, the word daughter or *bent* readily recalls its meanings: "belonging to" or "being given birth to." Calling these women "daughters

of the PLO," however, did not reflect the fact that, except for the very youngest, nationalist awakening was rooted in their youth during turbulent and fateful events in modern Palestinian and Arab history—long before the PLO existed. Thus, I chose the name *Daughters of Palestine*.

The Palestinian women's leadership belongs to three generations, separated not by precise age intervals but by the fact that their early political socialization was formed in separate but connected political eras. These eras include: the time of crisis in Palestine in 1948 that culminated with the establishment of the Jewish state, Israel, and the Palestinian catastrophe; the Arab nationalist period, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, when President Jamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt led the Palestinian cause; and, the 1967 War that ended with the victory of Israel over its bordering Arab states.

The first generation is represented by four women born in the 1920s in Palestine, who therefore were young adults in 1948. This group, sometimes referred to as the "mothers' generation" by the younger set, became leaders via their work in women's charitable societies.

During the period 1964–1968, the first generation of leaders established the General Union of Palestinian Women, under the auspices of the PLO. It was a historic move because it opened up opportunities for women to participate in the struggle for national liberation, side by side with men. The first generation bore the memories of the Palestinian tragedy but, in the end, could only act as caregivers, helping those less fortunate. It was the kind of community work suited to their middle- and upper-class social background.

The second generation is the largest in the leadership, twenty women born during the 1930s and 1940s, almost all in Palestine. They became politicized during the height of the Arab nationalist and leftist movements, when Nasser of Egypt was the unmatched voice of the Arab world. The Palestinian National Movement brought this generation to leadership, and they were all members of cadre organizations of PLO factions. Their legacy was to transform the General Union of Palestinian Women into a mobilizational organization which, for the first time, included thousands of women living in refugee camps. This task was accomplished during the movement's Lebanon period, 1971–1982. Several women in this generation, however, did not achieve leadership status until the '80s.

The third generation consists of ten women born in the 1950s; about half live in the West Bank; the rest live across the border in Arab countries. (Together, the vast majority of the thirty-four women was born within the boundaries of pre-1948 Palestine.) The crucial political catalyst for the youngest generation was the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, previously held by Jordan and Egypt respectively.

The third generation rose to leadership roles in the '80s—and their story continues to unfold. Seven followed in their older sisters' footsteps as leaders of women's organizations, including the Women's Union in Tunis and the four unions of women's committees in the Occupied Territories. The remaining three worked as high-level political advisors and strategists, primarily in the international relations arena at the PLO's headquarters in Tunis.

Two in the second generation have served as advisors to Yasser Arafat, the PLO chairman. One is Sulafa Hijawi, whose previous experience included founding and operating the Iraqi branches of the PLO's Women's and Writers' unions. The other is the well-known face on American television screens, Hanan Ashrawi, who was advisor to Arafat during preparations for the Israeli-PLO accords.

Ashrawi is unique among the younger generations, in that she had not come out of either the factional ranks or the Women's Union. She had spent much of the '70s and '80s in private life, pursuing her education in Lebanon and the United States and an academic career at Birzeit University in the West Bank, only breaking out into public life during the Intifada, the 1987 uprising in the Occupied Territories. Ashrawi's prominence lies in her ability to speak for the Palestinian cause to Western audiences. As the peace process began in 1990, her impressive communication skills were drawn upon by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who brought her into the Middle East peace process as a behind-the-scenes negotiator and spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation at the Middle East Peace Conference.

Ashrawi's international role was an important breakthrough in the long journey of Palestinian women toward public life. It was a process that began early in the twentieth century with the foremothers who started the women's societies' movement, and it was intractably bound to the national quest for independence.

II.

For much of the twentieth century, Palestinian women who took interest in public affairs were from the more privileged families of the middle and upper classes. This early leadership approached the women's question with a combination of liberal beliefs in equality of rights and a deep sense of duty to volunteer. Several local community and religious-based charitable societies were formed (the first, according to Laila Jammal, were the "Orthodox" societies established by women from the Greek Orthodox Church in Acre in 1904 and in Jerusalem in 1906).² Notwithstanding, superimposed over a belief in social change was the years of foreign occu-

pation. In the collective memory of the Palestinian women's leadership, the national question was never separated from the woman's question.

In the Palestinian political culture, the national tragedy began to unfold during World War I, promising the break up of old tyrannies but also shutting the gate of self-determination before it ever opened. During the war, Palestine became dominated by Britain, which then went on to rule it as a British mandate during the period 1920–1947—known colloquially as “the days of the English.” European interests in the Middle East had taken an unmistakable shape during World War I, as the Ottoman Empire, which governed the region, saw its last days. The division of spoils was formalized by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which set up British and French spheres of influence in much of the Middle East. It was formalized in the Treaty of Paris, which established the mandate system, thus extending international legality to de facto British control of Palestine.³

The other document Palestinians considered detrimental to their liberation was Britain's Balfour Declaration (1917), which promised Jews from around the world a home in Palestine. It also said: “Nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” The Palestinians never trusted this promise of protection and instead saw the declaration as a clear sign of British betrayal of their aspirations for independence.

At the time of the Balfour Declaration, the Jewish population in Palestine was still a small minority; they were approximately one-sixth of the population and lived mainly in Jerusalem. But waves of immigrants were arriving from Europe through the effort of the Zionist Movement that rose at the end of the nineteenth century, in part, as a response to nation-building in Europe and, in part, as a response to anti-Jewish sentiment. The conflict between the Arab majority and the growing Jewish population—and between both and the British—simmered throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and increasingly boiled over into violence.

The Palestinian community was weak and disunited. Their leadership came from notable families like the Husaynis, Nashashibis, 'Alamis, Abdel Hadis, and Shehadehs. Men from these families established the first Arab Palestinian political parties like the Palestine Arab Party, the National Defense Party, and the Independence Party. These were early signs of indigenous democratic development, and they were as much the manifestation of the debate over the future of Palestine as they were of traditional rivalries among these leading families.

In the end, even with military help from some of the neighboring Arab countries, the Arabs proved no match for the more resourceful and better-organized Zionist forces. The result was that the state of Israel was

successfully established after Britain terminated its mandate in 1947 and turned over the responsibility for Palestine to the United Nations.

The earliest political stirring by women during the pre-1948 period was during the 1920s, when the leadership of the women's charitable societies movement began to grapple with the reality of British rule and with the increasing Jewish immigration from Europe. Its first collective action was in 1929, when leading women from the charitable societies convened the First Arab Women's Congress to voice women's support to the national cause.

The participants of the Congress made history by staging the first Palestinian Arab women's march. It was a remarkable procession of some eighty cars that travelled to the office of the British High Commissioner. There the women submitted petitions that demanded the annulment of the Balfour Declaration, the cessation of Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the end of the torture of Arab political prisoners.⁴

On occasion, women participated in political education by giving lectures or speeches, or writing in the newspapers about the political situation and women's issues.⁵ Otherwise, women poured their nationalist energies into assisting families of political prisoners and martyrs and the poor in general. In the charitable societies sphere, however, communalism and the absence of mobilizational strategies for the masses prevailed, as it did in the political parties movement.

The critical role of women in social relief is of course a worldwide phenomenon, but among Palestinians it grew in volume with each new crisis: the 1929 and 1936 Palestinian rebellions; the Arab-Israeli wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973; the Jordanian and Lebanese civil wars; and the Intifada in the Occupied Territories. Charitable work, however, was traditionally perceived as a non-political enterprise. Posing no threat to the social and political power structures, it was safe for women in the middle class.

What distinguished the Palestinian women's leadership from their foremothers was its redefinition of what was political. The first generation brought forth the earliest examples of breaking out of the strictly charitable work, and they, along with the younger two generations, became new models for how Palestinian women could participate in nationalist politics.

III.

The turning point for the first generation was the year 1948, when the Palestine question became "the problem" or *al-qadiya*. It is also called the Catastrophe or *al-naqba*. In just a few months, the bulk of Palestine's Arab

population had either fled in fear or were expelled by the Jewish forces from their homes, schools, farms, and businesses, and were forced to march to safety across the nearest borders to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Trans-Jordan, as Jordan was called prior to 1949. Some took refuge in the outskirts of neighboring Arab cities like Sidon, Tyre, Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, and Amman. During the period 1949–1950, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), 726,000 Palestinians registered as refugees. (For the current refugee population registered with UNRWA and their locations, see table 1.1). First-generation women Salwa Abu Khadra and Samira Abu Ghazaleh were among these refugees.

Salwa Abu Khadra was nineteen when she fled with her family to Damascus from Jaffa, the Mediterranean city made famous by its oranges. (The 1990–1991 Gulf War was *déjà vu* for Abu Khadra, as she again became a refugee, fleeing her Kuwaiti home of many years and taking refuge at her daughter's home in Egypt.) In her '30s, Abu Khadra became one of the first female cadres of Fateh and later became general secretary of the Women's Union.

Samira Abu Ghazaleh is founder and president of the Palestinian Women's League, a society in Cairo that is considered the Women's Union branch in Egypt. Abu Ghazaleh was attending secondary school in Ramleh, near Jaffa, when she had to leave. Living first in Jordan and then in Egypt, she poured her political energies into charitable work. But the depth of her anger was transparent in a line of a poem she wrote in 1948. She recalled it during our interview in Cairo and it said: "Make me a soldier, make me a soldier."

Others found safety inside Palestinian territory, behind Jordanian and Egyptian army lines, later set by cease-fire and armistice agreements in 1949. This group became refugees in their own country, living in camps difficult to miss, near every Palestinian city in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Until 1967, Palestinians living in these two regions were put in the unenviable place of being close to their former homes (standing on a hill at night, one could see the lights in the villages and towns), but prohibited from crossing back. Those refugees who settled in Gaza and in the other Arab countries, for the most part, became stateless. Those in the West Bank and the East Bank—forming in 1949 the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—received Jordanian citizenship. In 1948, Issam Abdel Hadi, who lived in Nablus in the West Bank, found herself under Jordanian rule.

Abdel Hadi, longtime president of the Women's Union, was educated at the Friends Girls School in Ramallah and had hoped to attend the American University in Beirut, when her plans were swept away by the

Table 1.1. Distribution of UNWRA Registered Palestinian Refugees*

Field	1950 Registered Population	1994 Registered Population	Number of Camps	Total Camp Population	Registered Persons Not in Camps	Percentage of Population Not in Camps
Lebanon	127,600	338,290	12	175,426	162,864	48.14
Syrian Arab Republic	82,194	327,288	10	91,476	235,812	72.05
Jordan	506,200	1,193,539	10	244,026	949,513	79.55
West Bank	—	504,070	19	129,727	374,343	74.26
Gaza Strip	198,227	643,600	8	350,620	292,980	45.52
Total	914,221**	3,006,787	59	991,275	2,015,512	67.03

Source: Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, July 1, 1993 through June 30, 1994.

*Note: These statistics are based on UNRWA's registration records, which are updated annually. The number of registered refugees present in the Agency's area of operations, however, is almost certainly less than the population recorded.

**This total excluded 45,800 persons receiving relief in Israel, who were the responsibility of UNRWA until June 1952.

war. Afterwards, she immersed herself in charitable work and, in 1949, while still a young bride of nineteen, she was elected secretary of the Arab Women's Union. (This is Nablus's most active society whose projects include a children's hospital, a home for the blind, an orphanage "for daughters of the martyrs," and a secondary school.) In 1965, Abdel Hadi departed from strictly charitable work to help create the Women's Union—and was elected its president (this will be discussed further in chapter 2).

Only 170,000 Palestinian Arabs, about one-fifth of the Arab population, remained behind in the newly created Israel. My family was among those who had not fled by the time Acre, my hometown on the Mediterranean coast, fell to the Israelis. This Palestinian fragment was eventually given Israeli papers that proclaimed they were Arab citizens of Israel.

Regardless of the social, economic, or political circumstances, the Catastrophe of 1948 had the uniform impact of deepening Palestinian identity. Whether living under Israeli rule or in the Arab states, like the Jews, Palestinian Arabs felt rooted in Palestine. The Palestinians often revealed this attachment to their home surroundings by displaying traditional cross-stitched embroidered cushions, engraved brass and copper trays, and miniature olive wood camels made in the Jerusalem area.

In 1990, some 15 percent of the Palestinian people still lived in refugee camps, the vast majority of them housed in some sixty camps assisted by UNRWA (the number of camps fluctuated slightly over the years). Created in 1949 by the United Nations General Assembly, UNRWA provided aid mostly in the form of food rations, medical clinics, and elementary and preparatory education (and sometimes also payed for secondary education). Walking down the narrow roads of any of these refugee camps today reminds one that it was the former peasants and the poor who were left living there. It was the youth of this segment of the Palestinian population who, in 1967, were galvanized by the armed factions and their call to join the Palestinian National Movement.⁶

Predominantly illiterate and living on owned or leased small farms prior to 1948, it was the peasants who experienced the most wrenching change in their lives. For most in the Palestinian village population, the 1948 exodus ushered in a sudden and final exit from farming. The host Arab countries, with a growing population of their own and with limited arable land and the increasing mechanization of agriculture, were unable to absorb the Palestinian farm labor.

Notwithstanding, many younger generations of Palestinians were able to be educated, providing the largest pool of professionals and work-

ers who, from the 1950s through the 1980s, built the infrastructures of the oil-rich Arab countries.⁷

One third of the Palestinian women's leadership was old enough to personally remember 1948, but the first generation were adults then and what they saw was recalled with unshaded emotion.

Typical is the story of Samiha Khalil, president of Ina'sh al-Usra society, which she founded in 1965. Khalil was the *graund dame* of the women's societies' movement in the West Bank and a nationalist figure who openly supported the PLO. I met Khalil at her home in Bireh one evening in the winter of 1990, just as she was concluding a meeting with representatives of neighboring women's societies. She spoke with the ease of someone who had been interviewed many times.

Khalil spoke of the time she was trapped with her family in Gaza, caught by the 1948 War. She said she stayed in Gaza for four years, unable to return to her home in the West Bank, which was less than two hours away by car. She eventually returned, but the journey was laborious and dangerous, as she traveled by small boat circuitously through the treacherous Mediterranean winter waves to Lebanon and, by land, via Syria and Jordan.

In Gaza, Khalil and her family were able to survive by staying with friends and selling Khalil's wedding jewelry for food. She knew others were not so lucky. She especially remembers the young mothers:

Every day, young women, like flowers, would knock on the door. They would say, "Aunt would you buy this bracelet, take it for thirty—it would be expensive—take it for twenty, take it for ten. We need milk, we need bread for the children." That began a boiling in my heart.

Khalil said what she experienced in Gaza led her to ask: Why? It was less a question than an expression of her indignation and anger. She then went on to perform volunteer work and raise her young family, and, in 1965, founded Ina'sh al-Usra, which means revival of the family. Khalil began with a sewing project that relied on one machine in a garage-type setting. Now her society is housed in a large building in the outskirts of Bireh, and offers a wide array of activities including weaving, secretarial and hairdressing classes, a kindergarten, a family adoption program, and a food catering service.

Ina'sh al-Usra also houses the Museum of Palestinian Tradition, which exhibits scenes and artifacts from Palestine's rural past. Among the displays is a key to symbolize the hope for return to Palestine. It is a large iron key laid flat on a white stone shelf of the white wall, just inside the

entrance to the museum. Indeed, many refugees held onto their house keys expecting to return.

Khalil and her cohorts in the first generation, and older members of the second generation, are nationalists *par excellence*. Theirs is the nationalism of cultural tradition, social community, and individual and national dignity. They are essentially centrists who, unlike the younger generations, felt no particular connection to other Third World liberation and revolutionary movements. Theirs is the nationalism of liberalism of the Arab independence movements of the 1920s and 1930s.

Their fundamental political psychology is a deep sense of “what is right,” and they see their role in the national movement as preserving what was left in the social fiber after the loss of Palestine. In Khalil’s words, “Our first job is to return to people their honor and pride.” “We don’t have a beggar nation,” she said.

IV.

The younger generations learned about the 1948 events mainly from the anguished, resigned, and, sometimes reluctant, voice of a grandparent, parent, aunt, or uncle. Most, in the second generation of leaders, are about my age. I was two years old in 1948 with no memory of what occurred, but this is what I was told when I was a child. I learned that my parents had in fact made preparations to flee with small suitcases readied for the trek to the Lebanese border at Nakura, eighteen kilometers away. But the Israeli army then entered the city and we stayed.

After the occupation, the remaining Arab residents found themselves virtual prisoners and were ordered to relocate inside Old Acre—the walled part of the city—to make space for the Jewish immigrants. Old Acre also became home to hundreds of villagers from surrounding areas who found shelter in the vacant homes of refugees who had fled across the border. The new landlord was Israel’s Agency of Abandoned Properties.

Among the second generation of female leaders—the twenty born between 1935 and 1948—one-third were old enough to have some memory of 1948. Fatima Bernawi is the highest ranking female in Fateh militia and is now head of the women’s section of the police in the Palestinian self-rule government in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. She was barely nine when her mother fled with the children, landing temporarily in a refugee camp near Amman. (They were able to return to Jerusalem later.) Her father, who fought in the 1936 Palestinian rebellion, had remained behind in Jerusalem. Bernawi did not understand what was happening and remembers asking her mother, “Why have we immigrated?”

Bernawi belongs to a small minority of African-Palestinians (both Muslim and Christian) who lived primarily in Jerusalem. As a young woman during the mid-1950s, Bernawi experienced racial discrimination while working as a practical nurse for the Arab-American Oil Company in Saudi Arabia (ARAMCO). She said, "ARAMCO used to refuse to let me give shots because my color is Black, even though I was a Palestinian. I used to feel racial discrimination when my turn came to give shots at ARAMCO." (The Palestinian writer, Fawaz Turki, who is Caucasian, also worked for ARAMCO then, and wrote about his rage upon discovering that the toilets at ARAMCO offices were segregated into American and Arab toilets.)⁸

A decade later, Bernawi's color was used by the Israeli soldiers to arrest her for the attempted bombing of Zion Cinema in Jewish West Jerusalem. Bernawi said the bombing was in protest of showing a film that celebrated the 1967 War, but the bomb did not explode. She said, "Of course, they arrested all the young women from African origin." "As you know, my father is African," she reiterated.

The political consciousness of the second generation was woven from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, when Nasser of Egypt led the Arab Nationalists Movement. By then, most of the Arab countries were at least nominally independent.⁹ The Palestinian elites, however, were immobilized and in disarray. All that remained was a powerless organization, the All-Palestine Committee, which survived briefly in Gaza.¹⁰ Palestinians, like all Arabs, were in search of a new leadership that would define the Arab agenda in the post-independence era and liberate Palestine.

The second generation marched through their youth during the time of Nasser and were full of hope and dreams of change. They were compatriots of the '60s' generation in the West, in that they challenged traditional norms. But they were political allies with their disenfranchised parents, sharing with them the fundamental loss of Palestine.

What the Palestinian youth most hoped for was to realize their parents' dream of the return. The songs "Jerusalem" and "We shall return to our neighborhood" (*al-qudsu* and *sanarje'u yawman ila hayena*), by the legendary Lebanese singer Firouz, were as emotionally wrenching to the youth as they were to their parents. Also rousing were nationalist songs played to military marching tunes that beamed out of state-owned radio stations in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad.

At a glance, political events of the 1950s can be reduced to a list of toppled monarchies, pro-West alliances, military adventures, and a wealth of nationalist rhetoric. Anti-West sentiment grew in strides with each event: the Baghdad Pact in 1955; Egypt's nationalization of the Suez

Canal and the British, French, and Israeli invasion that followed in 1956; and the 1958 United States invasion of Lebanon.

The Middle East became a playground of the superpowers, and the Eisenhower Doctrine said the United States would fight communism there. The landing of U.S. Marines on Lebanon's shores in 1958 was its first overt application. But that year the Iraqi military toppled King Faisal, the Hashemite grandson of King Faisal of Mecca—made famous in the West by stories of T.E. Lawrence's adventures in Arabia. Also in 1958, Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic.

The 1950s saw exciting Arab political movements: the Ba'ath Party (meaning *resurrection*), founded by Michel Aflaq from Syria; and the Arab Nationalists Movement, led by Palestinian George Habash. The Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist organization started in Egypt in 1928, was also active albeit primarily underground, since it was banned by most Arab regimes that were threatened by it. However, surpassing all of these groups in popularity was Nasser, who was without peer in his charisma and popular appeal.

Nasser took center stage with the message that prosperity would come with economic development and self-sufficiency, non-alignment in the East-West competition, and Arab unity. The enemies were feudalism, "reactionaries monarchies," foreign exploitation, and Zionism. "Colonialism, revolution, and Arab nationalism" were the three most frequently used slogans in Nasser's speeches, followed by "Palestine."¹¹

The liberation of Palestine was an inextricable part of Arab nationalist ethos and Arab unity was the path to achieve it. Arab nationalist rhetoric regarding Palestine echoed the 1936 words of Egyptian Muhammad Hussein Heykal: "Imperialists wish to transform Palestine into a foreign land, that is, to deprive it of its Arabism and its Islam and to detach it like a piece of flesh from the Arab body."¹²

The second generation grew up listening to Nasser deliver exciting speeches broadcast on the powerful radio frequencies of Radio Cairo and Voice of the Arabs. The speech he gave in February 1958, to announce Egypt's union with Syria, summed up the spirit of his age. He said:

Today, my brother citizens, today is a memorable day in our history, a fateful page in our history. Today we feel that Arab nationalism indeed was realized. Today we look to the future and feel that it will be, by the help of God, full of glory and dignity. We look at the future and we look at the past and we decide from the depth of ourselves that the past will not return.¹³

It was a short-lived glory, however, unravelling with the Syrian coup in 1961 that dissolved the United Arab Republic and then the fatal blow of

the 1967 Arab defeat. Nasser died three years later, just as the Palestinian Resistance was winding down its first test for survival in the Jordanian civil war of 1970–1971.

The earliest memorable events of one-fourth of the women in the second generation were student demonstrations that often erupted during the period 1955–1958. In'am Abdel Hadi (a relative of Issam) was thirteen and living in Nablus when she participated in demonstrations against the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine. It was her first act of rebellion.

"I was from a conservative family that didn't accept much the idea of a female going out to a demonstration. I mean, with the young men," she explained. "Still, for sure, I had a bit of a rebellious nature for me to go out," she confessed. When I interviewed her, Abdel Hadi was living in Jordan and was a member of the secretariat of the Palestinian Lawyers Union and the Palestine National Council. She had also been married twice to Fateh leaders—one of which was assassinated in Rome.

Two women in the second generation mentioned a particular incident in 1956 or 1957 when a girl, Raja-e Abu Ammasha, was killed by the Jordanian security forces. Abu Ammasha, who was a fellow student, was shot as she lowered the British flag from the roof of the British consulate in East Jerusalem. Zahira Kamal, president of the Union of Women's Action Committees in the Occupied Territories and a leader in the Democratic Front, was one of these women.

This is how Kamal remembers the incident:

I was nine years old in the demonstration in which Raja-e Abu Ammasha was martyred. I mean, it was the greatest shock. I mean, it affected me. . . . From that time I was active in student movements. And in secondary school I also was subjected to interrogation by Jordan. And they (the Jordanian authorities) used to have a black list and my name was in it from that time on.

Living under Arab rule in her own hometown was no guarantee of Palestinian freedom and nationalist aspirations, Kamal discovered. For Kamal, this was a very disturbing but not bizarre finding, for it seemed to have clarified her thinking about the need for Palestinians to have their own state.

While the first generation raised their families and performed volunteer work, the second generation included Arab youth who entered universities in unprecedented numbers after the mid-1950s. Nationalist regimes were fulfilling their promise of public education with new schools and universities, low-cost education, and merit-based admissions. Universities in Arab capitals, including the American University in

Beirut, made scholarships available to Palestinians. In Egypt, under Nasser, university gates were opened widely to the Gaza Strip residents who, until 1967, were under Egyptian administration.

It would have been inconceivable in the parochial towns and villages of pre-1948 Palestine to encourage, or even permit, daughters to seek education—indeed, the sons rarely had such an opportunity. Now there was an uneasy coexistence of conservative social values and a heightened interest in education in the Palestinian society.

Pass through any Palestinian city—Gaza, Khan Unis, Bethlehem, Ramallah—just before the results of the Jordanian university-qualifying examinations were announced, and you could not miss meeting parents who were anxiously awaiting the examination results. The list of those who pass appears in the newspapers and gives the names of the sons and daughters who had a chance at going to college.

The universities in Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Beirut were centers of student activism. The American University of Beirut, founded in 1866 by Protestant missionaries, was a center of intellectual excitement, much like the University of California, Berkeley, in the United States. The students had their own unions, joined political parties and movements, and held informal literary and political gatherings or *nadawat*.

The cohorts of the second-generation women's leadership read Marx, Lenin, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Fanon; and they read the writings of Arab thinkers like Aflaq of the Ba'ath Party and Habash of the Arab Nationalists Movement. They also read the exciting new poetry of Mikhail Naimi, Adonis, Salah Abdel Sabbur, and Nizar al-Qabbani. Much later, in the '70s, Palestinian poets from inside Israel and the West Bank, Rashed al-Hussein, Samih al-Qassem, Fadwa Tuqan, and Mahmoud Darwish (who left Israel and was later elected to the PLO Executive Committee) were read as well.

It was not that women of the older generation did not go to the *nadawat* or read the new poetry, for these activities were common in Arab intellectual life, but that the younger generations were more fortunate to have their youth during a time of expanding educational opportunities. They found themselves in university settings where new thinking was explored on a scale never before experienced in the history of the Arab world.

In the words of In'am Abdel Hadi, who attended law school in Damascus:

There were popular movements throughout my school years. I remember participating in all the thinking that came out of the people. I studied at the Syrian university and, at that time, we had lots of weight. The students used to be able to remove a gov-

ernment. . . . I mean the climate was very politicized, and there were political parties: the Ba'ath, the communists and the Arab Nationalists Movement. Although I didn't join any of the parties, I remained full of enthusiasm.

Also, in the early 1960s, a new secret group called *Fateh* was posed to become the nucleus of the armed resistance against Israel. Fateh was founded in the late 1950s by Arafat (nom de guerre Abu Ammar), Faruq Qaddumi (Abu Lutuf), Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), and Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), men who began their political careers as university students in Cairo. Fateh founders were teachers, businessmen, and engineers, working in Syria, Libya, Gaza, and the Gulf region.

Secretly, they recruited, led commando raids, raised funds, and distributed underground messages that called for the armed struggle to liberate Palestine. In a few years, Fateh and other Palestinian factions or *fasa'il* would resort to armed struggle and in doing so would change politics in the Palestinian society, replacing the *zu'ama* (traditional leaders, mainly mayors and village chiefs) with *fida'iyyin* (those who were willing to sacrifice their life for their cause).

Among the first supporters were Um Lutuf and Um Jihad, second-generation women who were the young wives of Fateh pioneers. (Not all the wives took on political roles; for example, the wife of Abu Iyad remained inactive.) Um Lutuf has been in Fateh since the late 1950s, when she married Abu Lutuf, who became head of its cadre organization. Um Lutuf remembers how her husband sat her down, just before their wedding, to talk about what she was getting into. She said:

He said, "Will you carry the responsibility. I tell you there are three things that can burn a revolutionary: gambling, money and women." He told me, "Gambling and money I can take care of, but will you be able to make the journey with me?"¹⁴

Um Lutuf understood what her marriage to a revolutionary entailed and was enthusiastic to join her husband. In those early years, she helped him by doing secretarial work for his essays in Fateh's underground leaflets. She also tried to organize women, first in Cairo, while working with the Palestinian Women's League (the women's society led by Abu Ghazaleh) and, later, in Kuwait and Syria, where her family also lived.

Outside the few who were among Fateh's pioneers or had worked in the women's societies' movement, the majority of the women's leadership became focused on the Palestinian cause in the aftermath of the 1967 War and the Arab defeat. In fact, for the second and third generations of leadership, the 1967 War was the single most politicizing event of their lives.

V.

In the 1967 War, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip (also the Egyptian Sinai Desert and the Syria Golan Heights). It was the first Arab-Israeli conflict personally experienced by all three generations. If the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was *déjà vu* for the first generation, reviving dormant pain from the 1948 catastrophe, for the second and third generations, it was a confirmation of long-held fears—that Israel could reach them even in the mighty Arab capitals. This deep sense of vulnerability was somewhat new in modern Arab political pathos and its impact on the thinking of members of the women's leadership can be heard in several of their accounts.

"This was the first time I saw my father look defeated," said third-generation Salwa Mustafa, a PLO official who is Tunisian by birth and Palestinian by marriage. Mustafa has worked for years in a high level husband-wife team, most recently in Tunis for Abu Mazen, head of the PLO's National Relations Department.

Women's Union secretariat member Khadijeh Abu Ali was living in Amman and in her last year of college when she decided to join the Palestinian Resistance in 1968, giving up pursuing a graduate degree in educational psychology. (In 1976, Abu Ali published the first book ever on the participation of women in the Palestinian movement.)¹⁵ She said:

When I grew up, I began to have strong awareness that the presence of Israel in the region is doing great oppression and injustice to the Palestinian and Arab individual and that it is an obstacle to our progress as a society. It was a threat to me especially after 1967 happened and I was still at university. I felt what is the use of my education if, at any moment, someone will come sweep the country and occupy it. And I might die. The only thing, I felt, had meaning at that time was to struggle until one gets these people out, until one liberates this region and one can breath, build one's country and develop one's abilities as a human. That is how it started.

Lawyer's Union secretariat member In'am Abdel Hadi grew up comfortably in Nablus and, like most in the Palestinian upper-middle class, was quite shielded from the hardships that resulted from the Palestinian dismemberment, until she learned about the eruption of the 1967 War while she was living in Damascus and attending law school. It was during her journey back to Nablus, West Bank, to be with her family, that the refugee experience was brought home.

Abdel Hadi said she was forced to stay overnight in a refugee camp set up by the Red Cross on the Jordanian side of the border. She still

remembers what she ate at night, “a tomato, bread and salt,” distributed by the International Red Cross. “It was very sad and I felt myself a refugee,” she said. Soon she returned to Amman where she took her law examinations, worked for a while in television (but later practiced law) and, in 1969, joined Fateh.

Ashrawi, the former peace negotiator who lives in the West Bank, said she was politically awakened while studying at the American University in Beirut:

I was sixteen when I went to the university. It was my first encounter with real poverty—when I went to the camps in Lebanon—my first encounter with real misery. We were very sheltered, very protected before the (Israeli) occupation. Nineteen-sixty-seven is the landmark when I felt I had to do something and that each individual makes a difference.

PLO Ambassador Shahid, who grew up in Beirut, was also attending the American University. She said:

After the defeat of 1967, in 1968, I entered university and, in the first year of university, Beirut airport was bombarded by the Israeli military. The second day university students began to organize military training so that we can defend ourselves. “How is it that the Israeli air force could come to the center of Beirut City?” I entered politics from that period.

The 1967 War had a powerful impact on Rabiha Diyab who is head of the Social Work Committees in the Occupied Territories and is Fateh’s top female cadre in the West Bank. She spent her adult years in and out of Israeli prison—once in 1990, shortly after our first meeting. Diyab was an adolescent during the 1967 War. She remembered:

Maybe I was twelve years of age during the 1967 War. There was the Israeli occupation of the remaining part of Palestine—contrary to what we expected. We used to learn in school about the Algerian Jamilah Buhayd and in poetry that told of her role in the struggle for her country against France. I used to think, as was said, the Arabs would liberate Palestine after one or two years. I was the kind who loved to say: my God, I hope that Palestine would not be liberated until I finish secondary school, finish my education so that I can participate in the struggle.

In Palestinian history, the 1967 War was the event that unleashed Palestinian and Arab rage, bringing thousands of young people knocking on the gates of Fateh and other rapidly formed Palestinian militias.

Palestinian youth thought they could finally have their day with Israel. There were secret cells and militia camps; mass organizations like the students' and women's unions; and a growing revolutionary media of small secretly distributed leaflets and pamphlets that espoused the ideas of the Palestinian Revolution.

Two factions took center stage and remained there to represent the ideological and organizational poles of the Palestinian National Movement. The Arafat-led Fateh supported a Palestinian nationalist agenda, saying the slogan, "Arab unity for the liberation of Palestine" died in the 1967 War. These words, which during Nasser's time seemed indelible, were replaced with "The liberation of Palestine is the road to Arab unity." Fateh soon flourished and its organization moved from its clandestine existence to become a catchall, loosely organized party whose ranks gathered Marxist-Leninists, Ba'athists, Muslim Brothers—but mainly patriots uncomfortable with all ideological labels.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was essentially the Palestine branch of the Arab Nationalists Movement, led by George Habash. After the 1967 defeat, the Popular Front adopted an armed struggle strategy and in 1968 also embraced Marxism-Leninism, to "give the Palestinian Revolution its class content," it said. However, the group soon learned that atheism and class struggle held little appeal among the conservative Palestinian mainstream whose most urgent battle was for the homeland.

The Popular Front remained small, appealing mainly to members of the urban, better-educated classes, but its influence on the Palestinian movement went beyond its size. The Front represented a long-active current in the Palestinian left, and its plane hijackings in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought it further national recognition. But in the long term, the Front was able to survive and keep its role of "loyal opposition" by maintaining a secretive, tightly organized, and well-trained cadre organization.

The Palestinian factions were the organizational home of second- and third-generation leaders. These women were contemporaries of the Arab nationalist revival, but had become impatient with the resignation of their parents' generation, and with the old rhetoric of the protracted Arab war to liberate Palestine. They looked for role models in Mao Tse-tung and other heroes of Third World revolutionary movements, and thought armed struggle and popular mobilization were the way to liberate Palestine.¹⁶ They were fairly young, mostly in their teens and 20s. Not yet invested in marriage and raising children—some having postponed that to attend college—they were receptive to the risky political lives upon which they would embark. And the Palestinian factions provided the framework and the opportunities.

The major upheavals—the 1948 War, the turbulent 1950s and 1960s, the 1967 War—were events commonly experienced by the bulk of the Palestinian people (and the Arab world in general). In themselves, these events shed some light on why certain individuals made a lifelong commitment to the Palestinian cause. How is it that certain women were able to break out of long-honored norms of behavior for the Arab female that prescribed fundamentally private and social roles—not political ones? In the case of the Palestinian women’s leadership, the answer lies in an extraordinary social and familial background.

VI.

At a glance, these women appear inconspicuous. Like most in the urban Arab middle class, their attire is modest and modern (not the traditional long dress commonly worn by older women in the villages and refugee camps)—none wore the Muslim veil. But their background was anything but ordinary.

Two-thirds were born into families that have had some involvement in politics. There were government officials, community activists, labor union organizers, and rebels. Ideologically, there were Arab nationalists, socialists and communists—but not Islamists, confirming the secular nature of the Palestinian movement.

These political relations are an important part of the women’s childhood memories and are noted with pride: “My father, before me, was a political person, I mean, a Palestinian fighter.” “Mother struggled since her student days.” “My father was deported to Syria during the time of the Hussein (of Mecca) Revolt.” “Mother was a revolutionary against the French Mandate.” “Father was the provincial governor of Horan (in Syria).” “Father was in the Jordanian parliament.” “Father was a socialist and a feminist.” And, “Father used to collect funds to distribute to Palestinian students in Alexandria.”

In sharp contrast, all nine women from the Popular and Democratic fronts said they (and one or two siblings) were the first politicians in their families, a phenomenon I am unable to explain fully. These women were from the second and third generations but that does not explain their distinction since Fateh’s women are also primarily from these generations. The ability for the fronts’ women to enter politics on their own certainly reflects the receptivity and encouragement of the leftist factions. At the same time, the explanation lies in part in the family background of the women of Fateh, which has always attracted nationalist families. (And I would also add that Fateh has benefitted from support of prominent

nationalist families such as the Husaynis of Jerusalem, the Abdel Hadis of Nablus, and the Shawwas of Gaza, who were pro-Jordanian as well.)

On the whole, as are most older Palestinians, their parents were relatively uneducated and several of the mothers were illiterate. At the same time, a significant segment was exceptionally well-educated; one-quarter of the fathers—but only two of the mothers—were college graduates.¹⁷ The women themselves are a highly educated group regardless of factional affiliation. All but one completed her secondary education; over two-thirds graduated from college, including two from law school; and one-quarter earned graduate degrees (in a variety of fields, including sociology, psychology, literature, mathematics, and physics).

Did their educational and political background pave the way for these women to become involved in the liberation struggle? Probably so. But these facilitators did not send them far outside the boundaries of the Arab, indeed universal, social norm of the traditional gender roles. The Arab term women often used in their interviews was *khosusiat al-mar'a*, roughly meaning, “the special situation of women.” *Khosusiat al-mar'a* refers to the collection of private and social obligations and restrictions on a female’s mobility, and has the end result of eliminating or, at least, inhibiting the opportunity to pursue an active public life. (This was not a problem for those leading the charitable societies, because their contributions were considered respectable social service—proper roles for women in the more prosperous families.)

In Arab society, the roles of daughter, wife, and mother are inextricably bound to the norm of honor, which is a precondition of female marriageability. The two elements of honor are the female’s sexual reputation or *al-'ird* and the family’s own standing in the community or *karamah*.¹⁸ The prime guardians of honor are the men in the family—the father and, in his absence, the older son, and the husband after marriage. When none of these males exist and there are no males from the extended family to take charge, the “provider and protector” responsibilities then fall on the mother and the older daughter. In practice, that means that the young female must secure the consent of her guardian if she wants to attend college, seek employment, or become involved in organizations. Political involvement meant closer interaction with unrelated males—and that could cause “people to talk.” The women who joined the militia in the late 1960s were particularly susceptible to accusations of “loose behavior.”¹⁹

The crux of the women’s honor question is that a reputation of “loose behavior” dishonors the family by saying it somehow failed at protecting its daughters. This norm still lingers in Palestinian society—even among the educated, although much less potently, and it is felt by both Muslims