From The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile, by Fawaz Turki. NY & London: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Preface

The major source for this book is my own recollections of what we have endured and my own conviction that ours is a just cause, a cause long forgotten by the Western world (self-righteous in its overly easy conscience) and long mutilated by the Arab world (self-satisfied in its mercenary games).

Consequently this is not an objective work. It is however a sincere narration of a phase in the history of the Palestinian people and of their response to the challenge of adversity that has confronted them over the past two decades. As I lived that phase and took a part in that response, what I have to say, subjective though

it is, may offer some notes toward an understanding of what we are doing now and an insight into the why and the how of it.

I am neither concerned nor qualified to indulge in the game of quote and counter-quote adopted by those whose business or ideology drives them to espouse the position of one or the other. I have discovered that with enough diligence, the historian can present a devastatingly convincing version of the Zionist/Israeli/Jewish (call it what you wish) claim in modern Palestine. Another historian, with equal reserves of diligence and partisan to our own claims and grievances, can come up with a perfectly valid and at the same time diametrically opposite view.

"The vexatious issue," as the problem of my people was called during the Truman and Mandate years, has now expanded and become the "Arab-Israeli" conflict; and it is felt that the solution of it by the big powers is as mandatory now as it was mandatory then.

Mine is not a vexatious issue, nor has it much to do with the conflict now raging between the Arabs and the Zionists. Nor is its solution dependent upon, nor will I allow it to be, the whims of the big powers. Mine is an existential problem having to do with the yearning for my homeland, with being part of a culture, with winning the battle to remain myself, as a Palestinian belonging to a people with a distinctly Palestinian consciousness.

If I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child, I am one now. Living in Beirut as a stateless person for most of my growing-up years, many of them in a refugee camp, I did not feel I was living among my "Arab brothers." I did not feel I was an Arab, a Lebanese, or, as some wretchedly pious writers claimed, a "southern Syrian." I was a Palestinian. And that meant I was an outsider, an alien, a refugee and a burden. To be that, for us, for my generation of Palestinians, meant to look inward, to draw closer, to be part of a minority that had its own way of doing and seeing and feeling and reacting. To be that, for us, meant the addition of a subtler nuance to the cultural makeup of our Palestinianness.

The experience of our growing-up years—blame that experience on the Arab governments, blame it on the UN, blame it on God, for the cabalistic interpretation of political events does not

interest me—has decidedly ravished our beings. It ravished the law and the order of the reality that we saw around us. It defeated some of us. It reduced and distorted and alienated others.

The defeated, like myself, took off to go away from the intolerable pressures of the Arab world to India and Europe and Australia, where they wrestled with the problem and hoped to understand. The reduced, like my parents, waited helplessly in a refugee camp for the world, for a miracle, or for some deity to come to their aid. The distorted, like Sirhan Sirhan, turned into assassins. The alienated, like Leila Khaled, hijacked civilian aircraft.

If there are still people around who call us "Arab refugees" or "southern Syrians" or terrorists, who want to subdue us, who want to resettle us, who want to ignore us and who want to play games with our destiny, then they are not tuned in to the vibrations and the tempo of the Third World, of which the Palestinians are a part.

Every writer and speaker wants to win his audience to his point of view, a point of view that is carried along by the weight of its supposed impartiality. I have no point of view to make. And I cannot pretend to begin to be impartial.

When I was a child, a few weeks after we left Palestine in 1948, I used to sit with a crowd of people at the camp, mothers and fathers and aunts and grandparents and young wives and children, to listen to the radio at precisely three o'clock every day. The voice from Radio Israel (or Radio Tel Aviv, or whatever damn name it had) used to come on to announce The Messages. Silence would fill the space around us. Tension would grip even the children. "From Abu Sharef, and Jameela, Samir and Kamal in Haifa," the words would come across the air. "To our Leila and her husband Fouad. Are you in Lebanon? We are all well." A few moments pause, then: "From Abu and Um Shihadi, and Sofia and Osama to Abu Adib and his family. Is Anton with you? We are worried." The dispassionate voice continues: "From Ibrahim Shawki to his wife Zamzam. I have moved to Jaffa. Your father is safe with us."

One whole hour of this. During it an outburst of tears at the knowledge that loved ones are well. Despair that a relative is not

yet located. Hope that in tomorrow's broadcast a good word may be heard. Then a trip on the bus to the Beirut station to queue up at the message office to send your own twenty-six words across the ether to the other side. Because you could not go over there yourself to say them. Because an armistice line was drawn as a consequence of a war you did not understand, did not want, did not initiate.

A few years later, we were still in that refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut where life was becoming harder and existence becoming more futile. The Lebanese authorities, conscious of the image of their capital as a "Western city," made attempts to move our camp, as far away as they could, to avoid offending foreign visitors with the sight of it. Our camp was on the way to the airport.

For bureaucratic or other reasons, the initiative failed. But no one at the Ministry of the Interior, and no one in any editor's office, bothered to consider or write about the hardship we would have endured had we in fact been moved forty miles out of town. Or the disruption this might have caused in the lives of children going to school, men going to work, the sick going to their doctors, and the women going to their shops. Or the indignity to a people already devastated by one uprooting from their homeland.

The story of these years is thus not offered as a point of view. It is not written with objectivity. Nor in the telling do I hope to win adherents to my cause. I merely wish to isolate our problem from the Arab-Israeli dispute, identify it and describe it in its human dimensions, for those who wish to know what it was like, what it will be like.

The relentless and persistent falsification of facts by commentators, and the two-decade-long custody of our problem in the hands of the Arab governments, have created myths around who we were and what we wanted. We were the primitive Bedouins roaming the desert; we were an illiterate and disease-stricken mass of refugees packed in DP camps; we were the hateful, embittered Arabs—indistinguishable from other "Arabs"—who yearned to destroy Israel and "drive the Jews into the sea." We

were the harmless villains of the piece, turned, at the end, into intractable ones.

Given their noisy pursuit of a commitment to Israel and the Zionist experiment, people in the West often blinded themselves to the truth and accepted these myths. Our problem, dehumanized, distorted, and twisted, was flogged into a state beyond recognition. Conversely, the creation of Israel became an experience and a monument. The Western world, which had long tormented and abused the Jewish people, hastened to bless an event that saw an end to their victims' suffering. A debt was to be paid. Who was to pay it and where it was to be paid were not seen as of the essence, so long as it was not paid by Europeans in Europe. After the pogroms in Czarist Russia and the crimes in Nazi Germany, for example, Great Britain and the United States, two countries that gave whole-hearted support to unrestricted Jewish emigration to Palestine and the creation of a "Jewish Home," were concurrently providing for legislation to control "alien entry" into their green and pleasant lands. This was but a manifestation of the style and vocabulary of the Social Darwinism they had for many years practiced in their rencontre with the "unfit" of the earth.

To illustrate this, I need only indulge in a recollection or two of the time I was in Palestine during the last years of the Mandate, as can any individual who has lived under a colonial system and experienced the "native" consciousness.

In the small township of Balad el-Sheikh, near Haifa, where we lived, I was returning home from school one day when I spotted an old man standing at a street corner peddling bread rolls from a tray on a wooden stand. Peddlers are a way of life in our part of the world, men who make and market their own products, unfettered by the structured patterns of a developed economy. Old men with gray hair, like the peddler in question, trying to make a living in a land that has long been ruled, exploited, oppressed, and manipulated by a succession of foreign occupiers.

A British soldier, a youngster with a machine-gun slung over his shoulder, crossed from the other side of the street, nonchalantly walked up to the peddler, and proceeded to beat him on the face

and chest. Blows that he aimed, violently and indiscriminately, first with his fists, then with his weapon. When the old man fell to the ground, the soldier picked up the tray, threw it in the air, and then began to break the stand into pieces, hitting it against the wall and jumping on it. With that accomplished, he walked away. All this was done for no apparent, no warrantable, no explicable, reason.

But our English soldier no doubt felt that since there were only Englishmen and one other species of humans populating the earth, he had carte blanche to act as he wished. If by beating up a "native" he could "feel better," then he was entitled to do it. He was not answerable for his act. Not in Palestine; not in India; not in Africa. If he ran over a child with his army jeep, so long as it was a "native" child he need only reverse his vehicle and finish him off. (It happened to a cousin of mine.) If he was being transported overland from his old base to another one across the country, on a tedious trip of long duration, then he could take his gun, aim it, and shoot to death a "native" riding along on his mule, a "native" working in his fields, a "native" coming out of his hut. When this soldier returned home, to live again among his race of Englishmen, he would be chastised for kicking a dog, convicted in court for libeling a man, ostracized for indecent language. (But the world, the times, the English soldier, and I have changed since those days.)

So when Theodore Herzl, the European from Vienna, spoke of creating "a rampart of Europe, an outpost of civilization" against "Asian barbarism" in Palestine, no one came forth to oppose the concept and its execution. The event was applauded.

And it came about that within a short time after its creation at the cost of much misery to others, Israel began to enjoy and bask in the image of a land transformed from, as is often said, "the deserts and marshes of Palestine into the garden that is the Zionist state." Israel was beyond reproach. It had proved itself for the David that it was, surrounded by a monstrous Goliath dedicated to its destruction. There was no question of the integrity and innocence of Israel. There was no question either of who the villains of the region were. (It was too bad about "the Arab refugees"—who

as recently as 1918 had formed 92 percent of the population of the country—but they had left voluntarily, opted to live in refugee camps and, at any rate, they too were the enemy. Resettlement of refugees was a picayune problem that remained unsolved because of Arab intransigence.)

The vast machinery of Zionist propaganda, with a great helping hand from Nasser and his fellow Arab leaders, to whom irresponsible pronunciamentos became a fetish, fostered and enhanced this image of a tiny Israel that deserved to continue its mission and its harmless endeavors in the face of the enemy. Everything with Israel that had been and that was is as it must be. Books with titles like *The Miracle in the Desert*, *Israel's Struggle for Survival*, and *Hope and Fulfillment* discussed the miracle in the desert, Israel's struggle for survival and hope and fulfillment. The Jewish and the Zionist causes were inextricably tied and seen as one.

The consequences of this blind faith in Israel and Israel's activities and intentions were extensive. The foundations of this image were little shaken when Israel blatantly allied itself with the imperialist powers in the 1956 tripartite aggression against Egypt. The massacre of Kafr Qassem in that same year, that senseless murder of fifty-one men, women, and children who were on their way home from the fields, was hardly reported in the Western press. More than that, little was written on how the Israeli government itself attempted to suppress the news of the massacre, or on the fact that when the news did ultimately surface and punishment was meted out in the courts, the convicted soldiers served a total of less than one year in jail (and on release some returned to serve in the government). The way the "niggers of Israel," as Hal Draper called the Palestinians living in Israel, were treated in their own homeland by the authorities and by Israeli society was never considered a subject that warranted debate or reporting.

The faults of Israel are not my problem. Let those who support it ponder them. But it has been a paradox of unfathomable dimensions to me, unable to experience the Western consciousness, to watch the spectacle of those commentators and activists who have proved themselves worthy of any liberal cause, any humanitarian endeavor, any opposition to oppression, any support for the libera-

tion of colonized or persecuted minorities, yet who, vis-à-vis Israel, remain blind to, or brush aside evidence of, Israeli guilt of the same crimes they are themselves crusading against.

With pressures such as these and with the dividends Arab leaders such as Nasser have derived from co-opting our cause for their own nefarious purposes, the central issue that truly was the origin of the crisis, the Palestinian problem, has been lost to sight and sound.

Why this problem was allowed to come about in the first place is the business of the historian. He has a habit of tracing the development of every conflict, pinpointing where its seeds were planted, and endowing every subsequent event with immanent logic. He should be wished luck. For as I. F. Stone has suggested, if God is now truly dead, as some say he is, he undoubtedly died from trying to untangle the origins of the Middle East conflict.

But when and how this problem will be solved *is* our business. We have picked up our own habits, in this world, in this age of ours.

1. Flight

I am aware that I have been stateless for nearly all of my twenty-nine years; that I have lived and grown up in a refugee camp on the edge of the desert; that except for those freckle-nosed bureaucrats in the West who from time to time endorsed a shipment of food and warm blankets to me, I did not (for all men and for all they knew) exist on the face of this globe; that I was robbed of my sense of purpose and sense of worth as a human being and was forced to line up obsequiously outside UN food depots each month; and that when for two decades I feared, I feared only the cold of twenty winters, and when I dreamed, I dreamed only of

Long before the close of the second decade of their dispersion in the Arab world, Palestinians were holding the most sensitive positions in technology and commerce, occupying the faculties of major universities in the Arab capitals, and becoming active in the arts, science and banking.

Then came the Six Day War, and many of us became refugees for the second time. The space that encompassed our fractured being became intolerable. The humble pie that we had eaten was no longer edible. Our dependence on disreputable Arab governments and an unsympathetic world became meaningless. The artificial and jargonized rhetoric from Arab leaders and commentators sitting behind their microphones became, in retrospect, nonsensical and empty.

We debunked the old values and the old ways, the old truths and the old irreconcilables, the old concerns and the old displacements, and re-examined the options. We were solving our own problem, in our own way, in our own time.

schools. Out of 120 countries reporting data to UNESCO, for the 1963–1964 period, the Palestinians ranked thirteenth—on a level with France and Czechoslovakia.

2. The Camp and the City

A breeze began to blow as we moved slowly along the coast road, heading to the Lebanese border—my mother and father, my two sisters, my brother and I. Behind us lay the city of Haifa, long the scene of bombing, sniper fire, ambushes, raids, and bitter fighting between Palestinians and Zionists. Before us lay the city of Sidon and indefinite exile. Around us the waters of the Mediterranean sparkled in the sun. Above us eternity moved on unconcerned, as if God in his heavens watched the agonies of men, as they walked on crutches, and smiled. And our world had burst, like a bubble, a bubble that had engulfed us within its warmth. From then on I

would know only crazy sorrow and watch the glazed eyes of my fellow Palestinians burdened by loss and devastated by pain.

April 1948. And so it was the cruelest month of the year; but there were crueler months, then years.

Abba Eban, in his book *My People*, dismisses the Palestinians within quotation marks, and Golda Meir once demanded: "The Palestinians? Who are they? They don't exist!" But that was us streaming into Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, with tales of horror, persecution, and fear, walking around in a daze, confronting one another with a set of baffling facts, but willing to wait for a few weeks, even months, to return to our towns, homes, shops, offices, and businesses. Gradually, Palestinians, finding themselves unwelcome guests in host countries with depressed economies reluctant to absorb or aid them, capitulated and started to line up each month at the newly set up UNRWA food depots. A great many refugees discovered themselves, in the very early stages of homelessness, if not already living in camps, surely gravitating toward them. Hunger, as only those who have felt the ache of hunger know, is a much more potent emotion than pride. The latter is violently smothered when one's sensibilities and intellect are engulfed by nothing other than a daily search for food, warm clothing, and satisfying the needs of a newly arrived baby. Destitution, unwarranted and inexplicable, had then started to leave its shattering effects on the very fabric of our beings.

After a few months in Sidon, we moved again, a Palestinian family of six heading to a refugee camp in Beirut, impotent with hunger, frustration, and incomprehension. But there we encountered other families equally helpless, equally baffled, who like us never had enough to eat, never enough to offer books and education to their children, never enough to face an imminent winter. In later years, when we left the camp and found better housing and a better life outside and grew up into our early teens, we would complain about not having this or that and would be told by our mothers: "You are well off, boy! Think of those still living there in the camps. Just think of them and stop making demands." We would look out the window and see the rain falling and hear

the thunder. And we would remember. We would understand. We would relent as we thought "of those still living there."

Man adapts. We adapted, the first few months, to life in a refugee camp. In the adaptation we were also reduced as men, as women, as children, as human beings. At times we dreamed. Reduced dreams. Distorted ambitions. One day, we hoped, our parents would succeed in buying two beds for me and my sister to save us the agonies of asthma, intensified from sleeping on blankets on the cold floor. One day, we hoped, there would be enough to buy a few pounds of pears or apples as we had done on those special occasions when we fought and sulked and complained because one of us was given a smaller piece of fruit than the others. One day soon, we hoped, it would be the end of the month when the UNRWA rations arrived and there was enough to eat for a week. One day soon, we argued, we would be back in our homeland.

Old men would sit in the shade of nearby side-street cafes and discuss "our problem" and recount stories of martyrs who were killed off by the Turks, the British, and later the Zionists. Abu Salim, a well-known poet from Haifa, would sit amongst them to recite or, aided by a few glasses of arak, compose verses on Palestine. First Abu Salim would walk down the path, in the early evening, followed by a horde of kids reverently whispering "Salam alleik, salam alleik," and sit at his favorite table and await his narjeel. Soon the men from the other cafes would go over to join him.

He would say little as he sucked at his pipe and took an occasional sip at his drink (he was a Christian), but at that break in the conversation or the heated passion when the men would fall silent to add a burning coal to their narjeels, he would read his lines to us till the late hours. The moths would gather around the kerosene lamps and the men would mumble between verses "Ya leil, ya aein" (my night, my mind—they have fused). It is a typical Palestinian night, Palestinian mind. And we would know we were together in a transplanted village that once was on the road to Jaffa, that once was in the north of Haifa, that once was close to Lydda.

For if we had indeed acquired that "hate and bitterness" that the Western world claimed we were reputed for, we also danced the dabke, played the oud, and the women worked their embroidery. And those people outside the camp (not to mention the Western "tourists" with their blessed sympathy, their cameras, their sociology degrees, and their methodological and statistical charts), seeing our tattered rags hanging on us like white flags of surrender, but not hearing our "ya leil, ya aein," did not know what we had. A feeling within us. Growing. A hope. A hope. The sad feeling of seeing a star, alone, at dawn. The waiting at a gap between the onrush of sounds. The observer, enriched, becoming the observed.

Next to us there lived a middle-aged woman, Um Ismael, who made a living selling her embroidery in the streets of downtown Beirut. Her volatile temper and strong language usually got her in trouble with the authorities. On top of the offense she committed in not having a license to peddle, she was wont to challenge the police, at times using her fists, and call them "useless sons of whores"—for she had acquired the notion (and in those days she was decidedly out of her mind) that the Lebanese were in collusion with the Zionists to crush and degrade the Palestinian people. Um Ismael would from time to time rush to the camp after work and explain how she had seen a convoy of army trucks and tanks heading south.

"Where else would the sons of whores be going, I ask you? Now I ask you?" she would demand, gesticulating wildly. "I tell you those sons of whores are going south to help the Zionists. We have to stop those bastards, I say. Don't you remember the British and the arms they were moving up to Mount Carmel every day?"

Once three army trucks were passing by the camp, possibly on their way to Sidon or further south to Tyre, and there was Um Ismael hurling rocks, garbage, and obscenities at them before she was forcibly restrained. Luckily the occupants, peasant soldiers from the Bika, were more frightened of the mad Palestinians crowding around than the gendarmes would have been, so no confrontation ensued. After these violent outbursts Um Ismael would always break down and sob, mumbling pathetically about how the

Zionists killed her husband, Abu Ismael, and left her alone in the world. Um Yacoub, with whom she lived, would drag her away; soon she would dry her tears and revert to her old defiant abusive self, especially if Um Yacoub, who espoused our own version of a *Reader's Digest* optimism and faith in life, would interject a comforting remark.

"Calm down, Um Ismael, remember the evil you do will be punished by God. He will help us if we are patient, if we are calm."

"Ben sharmoota on my evil! What about God's evil? Be calm you say; didn't you see those dirty sons of whores going south with ammunition and arms to the Zionists?"

"I saw them; maybe . . ."

"I saw the sons; I saw them, I tell you."

"Be calm now, Um Ismael, please . . ."

"Ben sharmoota on my calm. I tell you those sons of whores are against us. The whole world is against us."

The days stretched into months and those into a year and yet another. Kids would play in the mud of the winters and the dust of the summers, while "our problem" was debated at the UN and moths died around the kerosene lamps. A job had been found for me in a factory not far from the camp, where I worked for six months. I felt pride in the fact that I was a bread earner and was thus eligible to throw my weight around the house, legitimately demand an extra spoonful of sugar in my tea, and have my own money to spend on comic books and an occasional orange on the side. I had even started saving to buy my own bed, but I was fired soon after that.

A kid at work had called me a two-bit Palestinian and a fist fight ensued. The supervisor, an obese man with three chins and a green stubble that covered most of his face and reached under his eyes, came over to stop the fight. He decided I had started it all, slapped me hard twice, deducted three lira from my wages for causing trouble (I earned seven lira a week), paid me the rest, called me a two-bit Palestinian, and, pointing to my blond hair, suggested I had a whore mother and shoved me out the door.

I went to the river and sat on the grass to eat my lunch. I was

shaken more by the two-bit-Palestinian epithet than by the plight of being unemployed. At home and around the camp, we had unconsciously learned to be proud of where we came from and to continue remembering that we were Palestinians. If this was stigmatic outside, there it was an identity to be known, perpetuated, embraced. My father, reproaching us for an ignoble offense of some kind, would say: "You are a Palestinian." He would mean: as a Palestinian one is not expected to stoop that low and betray his tradition. If we came home affecting a Lebanese accent, our mother would say: "Hey, what's wrong with your own accent? You're too good for your own people or something? You want to sound like a foreigner when we return to Haifa? What's wrong with you, hey?"

I was seething with indignation and was determined to return to the factory and get into another fist fight, this time with the supervisor himself. I walked back and stood outside the office, which was on the ground floor and had a large window overlooking the street. I picked up a rock and started calling for the man to come out.

"Where are you, greasy two-bit Lebanese, come out, you son; come out, son."

My excitement brought on a sudden attack of asthma and I was beginning to wonder whether this was an opportune moment for a fight. "Come out you son of a whore," I persisted. The supervisor put his head out and began to say something, but when he saw me rushing in his direction with every intention of throwing the rock at him, he retreated inside the sanctuary of his office. The rock went through the open window. Maybe it hit the plaster reproduction of St. Alexis that he had hanging on the wall, or the cherished framed pictures of members of his family. Although he knew where I lived, I am sure he knew better than to come chasing after me at the camp. He would have been torn to pieces by my elder brother, his friends, or whoever happened to be there and realized that he was a Lebanese and what he wanted; and a Palestinian accent was not easy to affect. In those days the only strangers who ventured into the camps were cops, invariably

drunken ones at that and in groups. That night at the cafe I gave an account of my venture at the match factory and Abu Salim asked my father, as he scratched under his checkered headdress, "How old is your boy, Abu Khaled?" * When told I was ten years old, he said cryptically, "That's good, good."

For the next five months I floated around the camp and walked the streets in the city; I also started stealing from shops and getting into brawls, mostly with a group of boys from Baalbek who lived a kilometer or two down from the camp. Um Yacoub's son, Youssef, and I attached ourselves to a gang called Awlad Falasteen. We used to meet up at the Karamat hill to watch the football games and snatch lunch baskets from the stands. We became so daring and blatant at doing the latter that sometimes we would walk up to a group sitting on the grass, quietly relieve them of their food packs, and run away. Occasionally a cop would manage to catch one or two of us and we would get viciously beaten on the spot and let go. In the fifties the Lebanese did not practice the niceties of laws governing arrest, offense, trials, and detention.

In the summer Youssef and I got into what we considered a good thing, operating at the St. Simone beach, which was patronized exclusively by Americans, British, and other Europeans (diplomatic staff, businessmen, personnel from the oil companies in the Gulf) and was usually fenced in and off limits to nonmembers, i.e., natives. We used to go there, sit on the other side of the fence, and wait around until the beach got crowded. I would undress down to my trunks, go into the water, and swim over to the other side and walk around. Because of my blond hair I was easily taken for a European and was thus never called upon to explain my presence to the Lebanese attendants and lifeguards. Within a few minutes my trained eye would spot those couples leaving their beach umbrellas to go in for their splash, giggling and laughing, their bodies glistening with suntan oil, their faces healthy with

* "Abu" in Arabic means "father of." In Palestinian society a man is addressed as Abu followed by the name of his eldest son. Similarly with the title "Um" which means "mother of." Surnames prefixed by Mr. or Mrs. are rarely used except for purposes of documental identification.

patches of red from good beer or a good diet, and I would go there with the confidence that only a child of ten could have, wrap everything in the towel conveniently left behind, and calmly head toward the fence to throw the stuff over to Youssef.

"Bravo alleik, bravo!" he would say.

"I can do two more jobs, I think; wait on."

"Bravo alleik, bravo alleik."

We would return to the camp on the bus and sit in an abandoned hut near the water pump and examine our booty. There would be money, watches, cigarettes, books, cameras, fountain pens, lighters, and an excessive number of towels. The latter we could not sell and we gave them away. I gave one large one in particular to the owner of the cafe at the camp. It had words printed on it in English that he translated as saying it was the property of the U.K. government.

"It could be the words mean the U.K. embassy," he said. "I am not sure. The sons. I like it." He used it to wear around his middle as an apron, and in later months when it got tattered, used it to wipe the tables.

Youssef and I, along with some of the boys from Awlad Falasteen, also used to go to Ras Beirut, the rich area north of the city where affluent Lebanese families never tired, and still do not, of emulating Western habits and adopting Western fashions. If we did not go into busy shops to steal chocolate, tinned food, and other goods, we would walk down the zig-zag, off the lighthouse, to the beach and hang around there to talk and swim. Lying on the sand we would argue over how far the Palestinian border was from Beirut, the things we did and the schools we went to back home, and the girls at the camp.

It did not take long for my parents to discover the truth behind some of the nefarious activities I indulged in with Youssef and Awlad Falasteen and I was soon limited to an area in close proximity to the camp. I pondered the possibility of employment and decided to become a bread earner again through more conventional means than the precarious career of stealing. One day, with all the money I had then, I bought a carton of 500 packages of chewing gum and became a peddler around the Corniche, the

Borj and later, when I was more settled, outside the gates of the American University of Beirut.

Every morning I would take the tram to Ras Beirut, jumping off at every stop to elude the conductor, and push my goods to students. I discovered the virtues of the hard sell, which involved chasing after a customer, not taking no for an answer, and bugging him into parting with five piasters for a packet.* Occasionally an irate student would give me a shove or two, but that was the sort of business I was in.

I was beginning to make a lot of money, nearly three times as much as at the match factory. I would go home before it got dark, taking the tram, again dodging conductors—an art I became more daringly adept at as time went on. I would get off as the tram reached a stop, case the two carriages, examining the spot where the conductor of each was engaged, and select the most strategic of the four doors to jump back on again. At home I would sit on my bed and feel the joy of taking piles of coins out of my pocket and counting them.

But my ventures into the realms of business as a successful entrepreneur of chewing gum were cut short. A small ad had appeared in the paper which caught my father's attention, inviting children of Palestinian refugees to attend a free school run by an evangelist organization. The only price to pay, it transpired, was to kneel in prayer for an aggregate of forty-five minutes each day and open your heart so the love of Jesus could get in and learn that we sinners were saved only because He sacrificed his life for us.

My parents were incoherent with excitement, for my sister and I could go to school at last (my elder brother was now working for an oil company in Saudi Arabia).† I was equally exhilarated by

* One hundred piasters equal one lira. A lira is worth about $.32.

† In the middle fifties, with the increase in oil production in the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait, and the Gulf Protectorates, there was a great demand for labor. The oil companies had no difficulty recruiting candidates among the Palestinians, who were the most educated community in the Arab world. Hence Aramco and the other big concerns had a higher percentage of Palestinians on their staffs than others. However, political considerations were also decidedly involved, for it was be-

being able to do something so exotic and so exclusive as going to school. My memory of St. Lux Primary in Haifa had become remote and alien, like the dreams I desperately tried to recapture upon waking, when I had been the proud owner of brand new comic books and bags of fruit and cookies.

I was the first one up around the house the next day to remind my sister of where we were going. When we arrived at the address given in the ad, we were met by a middle-aged lady from Haifa, with whom my father initially spent twenty minutes talking about "our problem," the UN debate that had taken place recently over the refugees, and reminiscing on old days, places and events, feeling sure the future held good things in store for us and it definitely would not be long before we all returned to our homeland. There was a bond and a warmth between the two strangers—they were fellow Palestinians and fellow *déracinés.* Whenever Palestinians met in those days they would reach out to touch that vibration of intimacy, the sharing of a pain now blinding the eyes, and the intangible qualities of mind that made "us" and excluded "them." We became close, reached closer, as if to be equals in the sharing of our burden, our loss. The formalities that had distinguished or separated us in Palestine—the intellectual from the semi-literate, the professional from the artisan, the middle class from the upper class, the rich from the poor, the pious from the unbeliever, the Christian from the Moslem—were imperceptibly dropped.

Once when I was peddling chewing gum, I had run after a student asking him to buy. He turned around and, recognizing my accent, asked me if I was a Palestinian. When I said yes, he patted me very gently and very lovingly on the shoulder.

"Yirda alleik, ben," he said, giving me some money.

"God bless you too, brother," I said after him. And I felt it

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lieved that if Palestinian youth continued to find no employment opportunities in economically hard-pressed Syria and Jordan and paranoically sectarian Lebanon, this would ultimately become a potential danger to Arab societies. In the year 1958 Aramco, for example, had 76 percent of its Arab staff (excluding Saudis) composed of Palestinians. By 1968, with the change in the political developments and the emergence of a hyperactive and revolutionary fedayeen movement, Palestinians were being "surplused" in great numbers and few were being hired.

then; for it was within me—our individual suffering extended and identified as a group suffering that also embraced those others whose sensibilities were smothered and whose souls were degraded. I recall, years later, when I was at the beach with a group of Lebanese I knew from Ras Beirut and spotted a Jewish friend of mine sitting on the sand by himself and asked him to come and join us. When the fellow's identity was revealed his fellow Lebanese became hostile, addressing him as if the responsibilities of Zionism were his, as if he were uncomplainingly to carry the burden of exclusion, and carry it under the chin. In a moment of incomprehension (for so it seemed to me in those days) I became a Jew, the Jew became a Palestinian, bound into a commonwealth of peoples heavily laden, heavily oppressed. My hate for the bourgeois Arab and his value structure, whether I viewed them in a political context or not, intensified further. The irony of my plight was that as I grew up my bogeyman was not the Jew (despite the incessant propaganda that Radio Cairo subjected us to), nor was he the Zionist (if indeed I recognized the distinction), nor was he for that matter the imperialist or the Western supporters and protectors of the state of Israel, but he was the Arab. The Arab in the street who asked if you'd ever heard the one about the Palestinian who . . . The Arab at the Aliens Section who wanted you to wait obsequiously for your work permit, the Arab at the police station who felt he possessed a carte blanche to mistreat you, the Arab who rejected you and, most crucially, took away from you your sense of hope and sense of direction. He was the bogeyman you saw every morning and every night and every new year of every decade tormenting you, reducing you, dehumanizing you, and confirming your servitude. To the Palestinian, the young Palestinian, living and growing up in Arab society, the Israeli was the enemy in the mathematical matrix; we never saw him, lived under his yoke, or, for many of us, remembered him. Living in a refugee camp and going hungry, we felt that the causes of our problem were abstract, the causes of its perpetuation were real.

Our Palestinian consciousness, instead of dissipating, was enhanced and acquired a subtle nuance and a new dimension. It was

buoyed by two concepts: the preservation of our memory of Palestine and our acquisition of education. We persisted in refusing the houses and monetary compensation offered by the UN to settle us in our host countries. We wanted nothing short of returning to our homeland. And from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, we would see, a few miles, a few yards, across the border, a land where we had been born, where we had lived, and where we felt the earth. "This is my land," we would shout, or cry, or sing, or plead, or reason. And to that land a people had come, a foreign community of colonizers, aided by a Western world in a hurry to rid itself of guilt and shame, demanding independence from history, from heaven, and from us.

I went to school every day with my sister, opening my heart for forty-five minutes to let the love of Jesus seep in and learn about the sacrifice that He made so that we sinners could live—and then to classes. I loved school like few kids ever loved school. The excitement of reading aloud, gloating over homework, rehearsing for a play, being first in class, reading books that were all one's own to touch and smell and reread; and to feel the power, arrogantly displayed at home, of adding and multiplying, of conjugating irregular verbs, of reciting a poem, of knowing the whereabouts of Indonesia, of recounting the exploits of Napoleon.

When summer came I looked around for work, but the indignity of packing matchboxes, peddling chewing gum, or stealing was not for a man of my endowments any more. I knew where the money was, and I was aiming high. Once when I was walking along the Corniche I had noticed a select swimming club that was patronized almost exclusively by Americans and British, outside which I figured I would launch an enterprise of sorts. So with all my savings in my pocket one sunny morning, I proceeded to the club searching for the nearest bakery on the way. There I bought twenty kaakis (hollowed-out pieces of rye bread with a hint of spices and egg in them), rented a tray and an adjustable stand for it, and set up shop at the entrance to the swimming club.

Within a few minutes a middle-aged Lebanese, who I discovered later was the attendant in the locker room, walked by, looked back hesitantly, and then started screaming with all his might. The fury in his voice was indeed frightening.

"You mob of useless sons of whores. I told you before, didn't I, I told you you were not allowed around here. Come on, get moving before I break your neck." The man's face had turned red, and as he seemed on the verge of striking me, I was too petrified to move. I was also loath to open my mouth as he surely would have recognized my accent and then felt compelled, or at least free, to knock me about. "Come on, move, get on with it you son of a whore before I throw you and all this shit into the water."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well come on. Why do you keep coming here? I told you, you mob of dirty swine, to clear out of here."

As he continued to give free vent to his anger, while I fumbled with my tray and its stand, which at that dangerous moment got stuck, I saw Mr. Des McMeekin walking up the stairs. Mr. McMeekin, a kindly soul from Kansas who used to come to our school to act as a speaker at the let's-kneel-in-prayer morning sessions and who used to pat the students on the head and whisper "Jesus loves you" in their ears, recognized me and interceded on my behalf, telling the man his anger was completely unwarranted.

"I know this boy," he said when he realized what the trouble was. "He is a student at one of our schools. I vouch for his integrity and I shall contact Mr. Abbas in connection with granting this child permission to continue his innocuous activities here. In the meantime, I will suggest that you refrain from intimidating him any further."

I worked there for well over two months. I did not do well the first few days, but as I became well known as a permanent fixture at the entrance, exchanging pleasantries with swimmers, some of whom called me by name, business picked up. At weekends I used to have to return to the bakery several times to replenish supplies. The locker attendant, whose name was Anton, became reluctantly friendly and left me alone. My connection with Mr. McMeekin, and my popularity with many of the members, were awe-inspiring for him. But I did not like his habit of coming up to my tray, helping himself to a kaaki or two every day, and not paying for them.

He obviously felt entitled to a kickback. Once he and his two sons, whom he brought with him to the club, stopped by and each helped themselves to one of my kaakis.

One of his two boys, who was about my age, associating the status of a Palestinian, particularly a Palestinian peddler, with the lowliest of the low, treated me condescendingly and as one of his servants that day, and asked me to go and buy him a bottle of fizzy drink. I told him I was busy.

"Ya?" he inquired. "Well, I want you to go buy me a bottle of fizz now."

"I am working, can't you see?"

"Well, if you don't I'll tell my dad."

"Get the hell away from me, son of a whore."

He ran down the stairs but didn't emerge again until they were ready to leave.

Anton at least did not make a fuss when I went to swim during the innumerable breaks from work. I would splash my way to the raft, a hundred yards off the diving board, and lie back with my feet in the water thinking of the adventure stories I had been reading by H. Rider Haggard and Ben Battoota and having fantasies of the day when we would return to Haifa where no one would say two-bit Palestinian because everyone would be a Palestinian.

Things were getting very awkward for money around the house, for although my brother was now working in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and sending most of his pay home, expenses had multiplied. With the improvement in our standard of living (we had moved out of the camp) there was an increase in the cost of it. We were forever making demands which of course were never met. This would be justified by the fact that we were refugees and that we were to be patient until we returned to our homeland.

We were refugees. That was all. They were supposed to be magic words to explain the unexplainable. We were learning, feeling, what the words meant. We were aliens. Pariahs. Untouchables. We were apart. But deep in our psyches, deep in our consciousness, we wanted to remain apart and hold on dearly,

aggressively, to what we had left. We were not surrendering those intangibles that made us relate to all our fellow Palestinians wherever they may have been, and bespoke the dimension of our problem. We held on, standing against a wall, imprisoned within the confines of our frustrations.

We held on. The Turks for hundreds of years had ruled over us, desperate to impose their traditions of cruelty and terror and rob us of our linguistic and cultural heritage. But our language and our culture came through unscathed. There were those in the Arab world who used us, spoke on our behalf, and had a great time coining a whole heap of phrases that told of the doom awaiting the usurpers of our land. Fierce passions were demonstrated here, violent threats were made there, and inevitable unity was to come about everywhere. And forever the promise that Palestine will soon be liberated and the Zionist colonizers driven out (into the sea, no less). No leader made a speech that he considered appealing to the masses without reference to "usurped Palestine" and the rights of its refugees.

This was carried to lunatic extremes, with the Arabic language lending itself well to those who could use impassioned rhetoric and manipulate its sonorous words. Many are the men who sob uncontrollably at poetry readings, at commemorations, or as they listen to speakers who have mastered their classical tongue and can sing its wealth of words. It is not essentially the words in our language that are in themselves effective, it is not what they signify or even the ideas they create. It is the sound of them that overwhelms the senses, engulfing the space within the listener and around him, invoking glories of olden times and touchable concepts of the freedom in the desert and supermen fighters who swarmed across the Levant to conquer the Byzantine and Persian empires. Words in a language that has remained virtually intact as pre-Islamic Arabs had used it.

Some of the best lines in Arabic poetry are untranslatable into other languages. They become gibberish or at best meaningless. Here is one that an Arab would recite aloud, stretching a word, shortening another, leaving a gap, then yet another word. And the

words register not a symbol, not a transmuted message or an understanding of an abstraction, but an echo in the consciousness that only an Arab feels vibrating in his being.

> I know; I know the herd and the night and the wadi,
> I know; I know the sword and the lance and the paper
> and the plume.*

I left the Evangelists and with a scholarship from our contemptuous stepmother, UNRWA, enrolled in a high school run by a Palestinian organization. I stayed there until graduation. The schools that UNRWA sponsored were designed—unwittingly or not, no one can say—to raise Palestinian children on, and educate them in, accepting their plight in life as a preordained thing. They degraded the minds of Palestinian youngsters and trained, indeed pressured, them into viewing their reality as the norm of existence, never transcendable in its dimensions. They were taught about and given as a model a world where their destiny was left in the hands of others; a world and a society with directions that they did not understand and were growing up unable to reconcile to the order they saw around them. No attempt was made to explain the situation and the forces behind it that ruled their lives, or how they were to respond to them. They were thus made more defenseless. No courses were offered to show where they came from, the history of Palestine, who the Jews, who the Zionists, who the Arabs were. No reasons were offered to explain why Palestinian children were studying the American Civil War, the invasion of Russia by Napoleon, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada—rather than the story of their own civilization and cultural heritage, so rich in literature and ideas.

* This is my translation of two lines from a poem by Abu Al-Ala Al-Maarri, a famous Arab poet who died in 965 A.D. The authorized translation was made by E. G. Brown and is rendered thus (in *Literary History of Persia* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1929], Vol. I, p. 369): "I am known to the horse troop, the night, and the desert's expanse;/Not more to paper and pen than to sword and the lance." The two lines hinge on the verb "to know" (*yaref*), which in Arabic means more than "to be acquainted with" and carries the sense of knowledge as well as having feeling and a wonder for. The perception the poet invoked in the word *yaref* is not rendered in E. G. Brown's version. Nor is it in mine.

Before long I became active in politics (it was common practice for high school students to be as involved as their counterparts at universities) and acquired views hostile to Nasserism. I was disenchanted with the way the "Palestine problem" was being manipulated by leaders with mercenary ends in mind, and could see through some of the mendacities that were then shamelessly mouthed by responsible heads of government. I was reading voraciously: history, politics, economics, and fiction. I was getting bored with school work, which I considered simple or simplistic, and with knowing as a foregone conclusion that I would get high marks for term exams in most subjects.

I joined the Parti Syrien Nationaliste, which advocated socialism and union of the Levantine countries—whose people the party maintained had always shared their culture, destiny, and struggle for independence—and excluded the Egyptians and other North Africans from their scheme of things.

It was obvious to me in those days that the Egyptians, who had never considered themselves Arabs before, had come on the scene to satisfy their statesmen's political ambitions for leadership of the Arab world and of pan-Arabism. I was repelled most of all by their distasteful propaganda campaigns, with all the lies about their efforts to bring about a just solution of the Palestinian refugee problem. Their concern lay elsewhere, in other fields; the Palestinian issue, which had become "sacred," "noble," "a struggle to the death," was only an academic issue espoused for exploitative reasons. Mine had become not just a dispassionate renunciation of Nasserism, but almost a hate bordering on the personal.

All around me I could see Nasserites with a blind faith in the efficacy of words, words that had now become a torrent washing over the Middle East from Cairo. They were driving the British out of Egypt, they were facing up to the might of the imperialist world, they were effecting a union with Syria (and soon with the rest of the Arab world), they were well known and respected on the circuit of the nonaligned nations, they were loved by Tito and Sukarno, they were going to drive the Jews into the sea, they were running the Canal and had wrought economic wonders in their country.

And the Palestinians, awed, enchanted, and wallowing in the splendor of good days that were soon to be here again, lived for the day when Nasser would liberate their homeland.

At home there were tense scenes when I would argue mercilessly with my poor father, ridiculing his naive grasp of Middle Eastern politics, or, in desperation, rip Nasser's picture off the wall and spit on it. In my bitterness and innocence I did not give the unhappy man the chance to hold on to that symbol of hope he saw in the picture of the smiling face on the wall. In those days of emotional crisis, in those last years of his on earth, he had nothing except hope. And he hoped. And a million people hoped. And I relentlessly attacked him, robbing him of that system of logic he had constructed around himself to interpret the tragedy that had befallen him and his people.

I grow sick with anguish. I grow sick with heavens. I grow. And I see my father, muttering "Yirda alleik, ben," his hair the color of snow, sitting in the corner of a room reading a letter from my brother, with the rain falling on the roof.

He looks up. "Have you given your sister her lesson?"

Yes dad. Yes. Yes. I have given her a lesson. I have given a million lessons to a million sisters. A million sisters I have, walking barefoot on the cold floors of mudhouses in DP camps waiting for the end of the month to eat their rations of onions and beans and dip their bread in milk. I have a million sisters, dad, with a million simple dreams and a million simple memories. They are frightened not of the dark, these sisters, but of the cold. They knew not the sharing of humanity, but the nuances of despair. A million sisters, Yirda alleik, dad, who are unhappy.

I am old in my teens. And the Western world sees me and us all as wild-eyed illiterate Bedouins roaming the desert, or packed in ghettos, too backward to rise above our squalor, to transcend our lot. The Israelis present the image of the suntanned sabras making the desert flower, and the romance of the kibbutz in a land where Leon Uris was indeed on the ball.

I was becoming emotionally involved in active politics and joined innumerable demonstrations, some of which turned sour and provoked brutal police intervention. I had not been arrested

yet, although I was hit on the head and shoulders a few times. But there were demonstrations and demonstrations, and some were fun. The visit John Foster Dulles paid to Beirut in the late fifties brought out a large crowd who marched from the American University gate, singing and shouting anti-American slogans, to the Foreign Ministry, where an official addressed us briefly, commending Lebanon for having laws protecting our freedom of expression and imploring us to go home. Everybody did. I had brought my swimming trunks with me and returned to the University on the tram (still dodging conductors) and walked down the campus paths to the student swimming club. I made a point of saying hello and speaking to people I knew there, to let them hear how hoarse my voice was. It was my badge of courage. They knew where I had been.

Another event that attracted a large crowd was the gathering at a cemetery for the burial ceremonies of a student who had died from bullet wounds at a demonstration (which I had not attended because of its pro-Nasser orientation). This was not fun. The police assigned to guard against disorder were standing there facing a crowd which associated them with the slaying of their fellow student. Before long someone threw the first stone and hell broke loose in a phantasmagoric scene of police chasing students running among gravestones and taking cover behind epitaphs.

I was never into demonstrations aimed at the ubiquitous United States Information Service or at breaking Embassy glass. I used the facilities of the former and could never bring myself to do the latter.

In one demonstration, one that was also fun and in which I picked up a surfeit of hoarseness, I led the boys from our high school, walking erect and carrying a flag (I forget which), to meet up with the detachment from another school outside their gate. When we arrived I got into an argument with the headmaster, intimidating him with the flag pole. He looked at me angrily, and with the best choice of words in classical Arabic, said: "Alas for a nation, indeed alas, that owns sons of your kind."

"I belong to no nation, sir."

"You are an Arab, are you not?" he demanded indignantly.

"No, sir, I am a Palestinian."

"Alas, then, for that nation."

Alas indeed. Amen.

One of the last demonstrations I joined before leaving high school had dramatic repercussions. It was a very large demonstration, and, as it was in support of the Algerian Revolution, it attracted people with different shades of ideology. There were Arab Nationalists, Nasserites, Parti Syrien people, Communists, and others who were not normally involved but felt called upon to join. The only group which refused to take part were the right-wing reactionaries of the Falangist movement, led by Pierre Jemayel, who emulated the French in mannerisms and behavior and whose rallying cry was: "Lebanon (*Grand Liban*) for the Lebanese." It was said on campus in those days that a Falangist would kiss your behind if you paid him the compliment of saying you thought him a Frenchman. Unlike most of us mortals, not finding it difficult enough being members of one world, they also wanted to be members of another—the world of our colonial oppressors, to be sure.

We congregated calmly, again outside the gate of the American University, and marched through downtown Beirut to a spot near the Foreign Ministry where student leaders made speeches extolling the noble war the guerrillas were waging against the French and the solidarity of the Arab peoples who were behind the Algerians all the way. It was a peaceful gathering and, because of the clear cut, uncontroversial nature of the cause, little heated passion was aroused. The press, the middle classes, and the government were in sympathy with the demonstration and in support of the guerrillas. When the speeches were over, and the boys were going home or heading to the beaches, a Nationalist, a Palestinian senior at the University who was well known for his activism (Palestinians formed a majority of the agitators on the campus), invited all those interested to come to the movement's city headquarters for more speeches.

I went along with a couple of my friends, taking a short cut through the back streets. The Arab Nationalists lecture hall and

information center were part of the second floor, above a movie house, of an office building with gaudy signs all over its front advertising the names of its occupants. There were doctors' clinics, tailors, lawyers, travel agents, a night school, a coffee house, a bank, and an organization called the Joint Christian Committee.

About two hundred people arrived, almost all of whom were students, and filled the hall in less than half an hour. The senior, whose name was Khaled ben Youssef, went straight to the point and exhorted us to reflect upon the virtues of our struggle against imperialism, the suffering that the Arabs had to endure under the Turks, the British, and the French, and our land usurped by the Zionists. He praised Nasser and the battle for independence in the Maghreb, condemned the reactionary and feudal regimes that remained in the Arab world, and called for an enhanced level of awareness among students of issues that confronted our region.

He was an articulate and eloquent speaker who was very much at home in his classical Arabic. "The land of the Arabs is for the Arabs," he thundered, to receive a long minute or two of applause. And when that subsided, he would begin again: "The land of the Arabs is for the Arabs," only to be interrupted again with more applause.

Other but less effective speakers followed, virtually reiterating what ben Youssef had said, and the audience was getting a little bored. Some of those who were sitting nearest to the door sneaked out. It was getting dark outside and the reflection of colored neon lights was flickering on and off the glass of the hall windows. I was leaning over to ask someone for a cigarette when word came that the police were surrounding the room and the building. They claimed ours was an unlawful assembly, as no permission had been granted for our political meeting, and demanded that we surrender our names, addresses, and fingerprints, among other things, after which we were to be allowed to go home.

Ben Youssef immediately took over and maintained that the hall was private property, that we were committing no offense, and that we were not voluntarily giving in. "Never," he shouted, and the crowd applauded. The events in the hall had been a bit of

a bore up until then, and now a hint of danger was introduced which suddenly infused the evening with the thrill of the unexpected.

Word was passed back of our decision to defy the police and stay put. Everybody relaxed, put their feet up on chairs, lay on the floor, or went out on the balcony to shout slogans or piss over the railing. In the middle of the night, Mr. Kassab, a respected and popular professor, turned up to speak to us. He explained that he was with us but that we ought to do what was expected by the authorities and that he had been assured by the police that no action was going to be taken against us, no prosecution and no intimidation. They merely wanted our particulars and fingerprints for their records.

"Never," ben Youssef shouted.

"Never," we shouted back.

"Good luck," shouted Mr. Kassab, and left dejectedly.

At dawn the police seemed to have had enough. They passed the word that unless we did what they demanded, they were coming into the hall to put us all under arrest. We still refused.

When they came in we were ready for them. We offered no resistance. We were tired and sleepy and wanted to go home, after having had all the fun we required. The men who barged into the hall to pick us up were soldiers, short young peasants from the mountains with bewildered faces and apprehensive eyes. They looked more uncertain than we did. The soldier who ushered me from the room, down the stairs to a waiting army van, twisting my right arm behind my back and walking me in front of him, looked decidedly frightened. I tried to engage him in conversation on the way, but he was too nervous to speak.

We were taken to a military jail near the Rawshi beach, outside Beirut, where they herded us into large cells and locked us in. In a few hours, when everybody had been safely put behind bars, they proceeded to take us upstairs in batches of ten to take our fingerprints and pictures for their records. One kid, still with great reserves of energy despite fatigue and lack of sleep, wanted to be facetious and made a face at the camera before his picture was taken. A cop walked over and grabbed him violently by the scruff

of the neck and said: "Sit up straight, son of a whore, or I'll bash your head in." The kid did just that. There were no more similar antics.

As no one could say what was to become of us, or how long we were to be behind bars, and as few of us had had much sleep, a mood of despondency reigned. There was little talk. Cigarettes, books, and periodicals were at a premium.

In the evening we were taken, again in groups of ten, to line up outside a room on the second floor of the jail where we were to be interrogated and sign statements. We all had agreed to say that we were passing by the building where the meeting was held, heard noise, walked up to investigate, and sat down to listen to the talk. We were not politically active and had no connection with the nationalists.

The interrogators mechanically asked us a few stock questions and made us sign forms before they waved us through wearily. We still did not know when we were getting out. A few rich kids whose fathers had hired attorneys and who had been taken to a special room to be interviewed, told us they were assured we would be out the following day. We slept on the floor, using blankets the guards supplied. Most of us were up at dawn to grumble about the weather, the condition of the cell, the facilities, and life in general. Some viciously blamed the Nationalists for getting us into a mess, others blamed the police for making a fuss of an innocuous gathering of students who wanted to listen to political speeches.

The Palestinians were getting uneasy as word was passed that only Lebanese nationals would be released. And sure enough, at about eleven o'clock all the Lebanese students were let out. The rest waited for two more hours before something happened. There were five or six Syrians and a handful of Jordanians; the rest were Palestinians. These latter were made to sign an additional statement disavowing any further attempts at involvement in politics or else be subject to deportation. The police official responsible for Palestinian affairs lectured us on the evils of meddling in the internal life of the state of Lebanon, and reminded us that we were aliens living in the country under duress. Pointing a hairy

finger with a big ugly ring on it, he threatened that should our names occur on their records again, indicating any further political agitation, we would surely be deported.

One kid of sixteen raised his hand, as if he were in a classroom, and asked earnestly: "Where will we be deported to, sir?"

"Never mind where you will be deported to, son of a whore, just do as you're told."

Before the day was out everybody had gone home. Ben Youssef's men returned to campus a few days later and said he had been beaten up by the police and was likely to be in jail for a long time, and later prosecuted on a variety of charges.

The political cell I ran for the Parti Syrien was expanding rapidly and we had to split it into two. The leadership of the new cell was given to Samir, a Palestinian kid whose family lived at a refugee camp in Baalbek and who was in Beirut on a special grant. He had far outstripped the students, and, it was rumored, the teachers, at his UNRWA school and special arrangements had been made to have him sent to a better school in the city. There was no doubt that he had an intelligence quotient nearing the genius mark.

Before we broke up to form the two cells, we used to meet in his room, near the lighthouse, every Thursday after classes. Our activities in the cell were quite innocuous. One of us, who would have been assigned the job the week before, would read out details of the political events of the week in the Arab world and we would discuss their significance and try to glean the truth behind them. Each member would be called upon to give an account of his proselytizing at the school and elsewhere. Teachers with known reactionary views would be mentioned and strategy for attacking them mapped. If a demonstration or protest was imminent, a review of its function and value would ensue. Word as to whether we would join it or not would ultimately come from above, but no resentment or chastisement would be directed against a member who felt, in all sincerity, that he could not take part or that the cause was not being furthered by it. Rarely, though, was there any violent disagreement among us.

From time to time the coordinator (a much older student, usually an undergraduate at the American University), who was responsible for five or six cells, would come by to attend a meeting. He was not identified as to his position and was supposed to be known only to the head of the cell, but in actual fact everyone knew who he was, for in his presence those who had been lax in manifesting their pride in the Arabic language and culture by using English words here and there (because they had no Arabic equivalent) would go through agonies to avoid them. Arabic language and culture, in our cell, in our party, in our life, became a fetish. It was considered contemptible to discard our own linguistic and national heritage to embrace another, especially if it belonged to our former oppressors, French or British. We were to excel, by all means, in mastering the oppressor's language and in learning his ways and his literature and his know-how, but we were not to emulate him, for that was demeaning. We would boycott cafes around school or the University with names like "Uncle Sam's" and "Queen's" and go to "Faisal's" and "Khalil's" instead. We played Arabic music and despised those who did not. In our self-conscious enthusiasm, it should be admitted, we also went to unnecessary extremes.

In one meeting Samir came up with a novel proposition that we discussed with fascination and later approved unanimously. He claimed that here we were, sitting like a bunch of sons, wearing jeans and corduroys. "Why aren't we wearing our own national dress?" he demanded. "The ighal, the jellabiya? Why not?"

We listened, for his question seemed to be phrased rhetorically. "Do you remember that day in class?" he asked me, kicking his chair behind him and standing in the middle of the room. "Do you remember when you attacked Mr. King in class, because, you told him, he had been in the Middle East for ten years and he could not speak any Arabic? And do you remember in the course of the argument how he said that many of us did not show a great deal of respect for our own culture for we were in a such a son hurry to adopt his? Well, the son of a whore was right, I say. Why aren't we wearing our own national dress, for example, and wearing his instead?"

We debated that and a resolution was passed. Money would be collected and saved till we had enough to buy a jellabiya and an ighal each. The plan called for the eight of us to descend on the school the same day wearing our new Arab gear and, although it was conceded that we would elicit snickers and derision, we were to remain calm and above all explain why we were wearing it and that it was our own national dress of which we were proud. At any rate, it was all for the cause.

Three weeks later we bought the dresses and I took mine home and stood in front of the mirror to change.

"What the hell is this, fellow?" my father said. I thought for a minute he was going to give me that long talk about how my brother was working in the desert slaving his son guts out so that I could go to school and lead the cushy life I had been leading and how I was wasting my money on shit and my time on politics.

"This is our national dress, dad. You see, we are going . . . I am going to start wearing it from now on," I said. When he did not understand, I added lamely as an afterthought: "I am . . . I mean, we should be proud of it, you know. I intend to wear it around, you know, and to school."

My father looked at me as if I were crazy. He did not say anything.

"Is there any reason why I should not be wearing the ighal and jellabiya? They *are* our national dress," I said a trifle hesitantly. During the last meeting at the cell we had agreed on how firm we should be in our conviction that there was no reason to be ashamed of our heritage, no reason why we should not be embracing it. We were not to be swayed. We were to keep our cool when confronted by the predictable accusation of being exhibitionists.

"No, boy. There is absolutely no reason. I think it is an admirable idea," my father said. "Admirable, I say."

Then he did something strange which served to confirm my belief that I was not only doing the right thing, but doing a worthy thing. He left the room and came back a few minutes later with a hatta, a kind of checkered scarf usually worn under the ighal.

"Look, this used to belong to your Uncle Adnan. He died defending that same heritage you are trying to resurrect or perpetuate. You can wear it," he said. A Palestinian hatta; red, checkered.

It was a bit too dramatic for me because I knew when Uncle Adnan was remembered around the house it was done with a hush. To us all (and no doubt to his wife and two daughters who stayed behind in Israel), he was a hero and a martyr, for he died in battle in 1947. And although in life he may have been no more than an ordinary fighter, in death he became a legendary figure, a brave man, a charismatic leader, and a great organizer. To have been given his hatta was an affirmation of my own struggle for identity and the correct direction I was taking for myself. I hungered for satisfaction that there was no shame in being a Palestinian, in my belief that not being a Lebanese, Syrian, American, Italian, Afghani, did not mean I was less than they were, or felt less, or hoped less, or lived my day less than they did.

I stood in front of the mirror and put the jellabiya on and adjusted the hatta and ighal on my head. I walked around the room with the bottom of the jellabiya trailing behind me. There was a sudden rise in my pulse. I felt a deep sense of contentment saturating my being, a feeling almost sexual in its intensity and gratification. I was a Palestinian, an Arab, and no other man in the universe could wear this, would wear this, unless he was a Palestinian, an Arab, a man proud of his identity and self.

The fad caught on at school; it caught on at the American University and around Ras Beirut among the student community. After a while the dress became accepted, and all students, at one time or another, wore it. It was a kind of proclamation, an advertisement of the fact that you were an Arab Nationalist, a Parti Syrien member, or just a person who was proud of his Arabism. The only group who continued to poke fun at the fad were the Falangists. "O, la, la," they would say in French, "C'est drôle, c'est bien drôle!"

It would not have been so bad if the sons had said that in Arabic instead of French.

Once our coordinator got picked up by the police and deported to Syria. This in itself would not have been so drastic if it were not for the background surrounding this man and the series of events

that led to his arrest and deportation. Ibrahim Ouayni had been a coordinator for the Parti Syrien for roughly eight months before he was taken away. He was a Syrian lad of twenty-three who had studied medicine at the University of Damascus where he originally got into trouble with the authorities. Although he knew well that the campus was full of police informers, he continuously sounded off and organized small, quiet, anti-Nasser rallies. Predictably enough, he (along with a few other agitators) was carted off to jail where he stayed for seven weeks and where he was subjected to beatings and long sessions of interrogation. He was released with a warning to lay off active politics. He did not. He was picked up again and this time the last jail he had visited seemed like the land of milk and honey. He was placed in a damp cell and isolated from contact with the outside world (including his wife, whom he had married only six months before). He was later removed to another, better cell that he shared with three other political prisoners. Here, however, he found that he was being taken upstairs for a regular nightly session of questioning, the sole purpose of which was to break him completely rather than extract any useful information from him. The interrogators succeeded, for when he was released he discovered that he could no longer concentrate on his studies, perform simple tasks around the house, or make simple decisions. He left Syria and came to Beirut with his wife and stayed for a few months. When he felt better, he returned to Damascus (although not to the university), only to be picked up again. This time it was done presumably on orders from the Deuxième Bureau which wanted all anti-Nasser elements locked up on the eve of the Egyptian-Syrian union. He was taken to what was apparently a minimum security jail, for he managed to escape and illegally cross the Syrian border into Lebanon. He stayed with friends in Beirut, feeling safe, as he never registered with the police who thus had no record or trace of his whereabouts.

In the meantime he made a living doing translation work for publishers and teaching occasionally at private schools that were not sticklers for work permits. He led a semi-clandestine life but he seemed happy. Indeed, it was awesome that a man who had

endured so much could have such staggering reserves of energy and enthusiasm and such humor and love in him. He would come to Samir's room for our weekly cell meetings and sit there with the contented look of a Buddha, interjecting an amusing observation here and there. Only when we talked about Syria, or the Syrian security police, would his face take on a look of panic. He would squint at the speaker, his eyes tightened into two slits, and appear demonstrably perturbed. He still had not recovered enough from his ordeal to let associative words go over his head. His only fear was to be caught and returned to the hands of the Deuxième Bureau.

He was making plans to have his wife come to Beirut to be with him and some of the boys at the Parti were helping him. Contact was made with her and she was quietly arranging to leave Damascus. Whether these activities themselves tipped off the police or whether there was an informer in the Parti, no one can say; but Ibrahim was picked up by the Lebanese sharmootas one night as he was playing the oud in his room. I do not know if it is true or not, but Samir claimed a few days later that Ibrahim had broken down completely as he was being arrested and shoved into a police van. He said that the Syrian had collapsed into a corner of the room and begged the sons not to have him sent back to Syria. He was sobbing and acting in a very strange manner. If all that is true, it still could not be held against him. Who knows what was going through the man's psyche as he was suddenly confronted by the knowledge that soon he would be back in a Syrian jail subjected to the same horrors that had nearly robbed him of his sanity and that he feared so much. At any rate, there was nothing we at the cell could do, although of course the Parti was going to do its best to help get him out.

On weekends Samir used to work downtown in the Borj, setting up a small stall of trinkets (razor blades, cheap lighters, pens, etc.) in front of any closed shop in the area. Business was never brisk, but what he made was enough to supplement the grant he had been offered, and came in handy for the occasional trip he took to Baalbek to visit his parents at the camp. As he had no license to peddle, he was always on the lookout for police vans or individual

cops, which made life miserable for him. From time to time we used to go down to the Borj to keep an eye on traffic and case the street for over-enthusiastic gendarmes, thus enabling him to do his work. He used to have his goods spread out on a tablecloth on the ground and, with the word from any of us about approaching ben sharmootas, he would quickly fold everything into a bundle and stand nonchalantly as if he were waiting for someone.

When things were quiet down the street, the group of us would sit down to talk or read or get into heated arguments over politics. Once Bilkassem, one of the boys from the cell, bought a small bottle of arak and became nearly paralyzed after drinking it neat. He stood up to give a speech and attracted quite a few passers-by who listened to his diatribe on issues that ranged from the guerrilla war in Algeria to the Falangist vermin. One man told him to shut up, and Bilkassem became violent.

"You want to fight, ben sharmoota? Come on, son. I'll take you on."

"Why don't you go back to where you came from, you Palestinian sons of whores who sold their land to the Jews!" This was a standard accusation to level against a Palestinian and over the years it became hackneyed.

The five of us (and two were Lebanese) walked over to the man and Samir told him to keep moving or he would break his neck. Things got more complicated when Bilkassem, who got off his soap box, started shouting "Let *me*, I'll break the son's neck. Okay, ben sharmoota, come here, I'll break your neck!" The higher Bilkassem's voice was raised and the more vociferous he became, the bigger the crowd got.

"Come on, ben sharmoota," Bilkassem persisted.

The man somehow managed to slip away and in his place two cops materialized, complete with truncheons, guns, and a three-day stubble.

"What's going on here?" one of them asked.

While we were trying to explain the problem we discovered Bilkassem had disappeared, drunk as he was, presumably to chase after the man who had insulted his people. The cops could not get a clear picture of what had been going on—we, along with the onlookers who were volunteering their own version of the story, were all speaking at once—so they told us to move on.

Samir picked up his bundle and we hurried down the street to find Bilkassem. As we neared the Roxy Cinema we noticed a small crowd gathered outside. And there was Bilkassem, carrying on about how the Palestinian people sold land to the Zionists at the early stages, in good faith, but how no land was sold when it became obvious that the Zionists harbored nefarious intentions in our homeland. Before we managed to drag him away, he again challenged those in the crowd who were Falangists, reactionaries, fascists, and those with right-wing tendencies, to come and fight.

"I'll take on any son, any ben sharmoota right now," he said.

"Let's go, boy," we told him.

"Any ben sharmoota. Right now, right now I say. Why should we take khara from these sons. Right now. Now or never. There are six of us."

We eventually got on the tram and the son carried on even there; but as it was a Ras Beirut tram, heading for the American University, most of the passengers were students so no problems ensued. In fact, Bilkassem's antics elicited a great deal of sympathetic laughter and at times mock-serious applause.

Although the incident was in later days a source of amusement for us, Bilkassem was severely censured at the cell for an act that was considered highly unrevolutionary—so serious a group of teenagers were we.

Another weekend at the Borj coincided with the visit the Sixth Fleet was paying to Beirut, and the city was crowded with American sailors. Three of them stopped to have a word with us and Samir went to pains to explain to them "our cause." They obviously did not follow, but they asked a few naive and polite questions and seemed highly impressed by Samir's command of their language. Every time they changed the subject, to ask about a good bar to drink in, Samir would steer the conversation back to revolution, Zionism, Algeria, imperialism, and self-determination. We took them up to "Khalil's" where we had ice cream and later to the University where they watched a baseball game between the American Community School and a team from the fleet. This

was where the three sailors explained at length the intricacies of the game and the significance of each move the players made. Samir was bored. Then they took us for a visit on their ship where we again talked.

At the cell Samir and Bilkassem complained that American sailors were not politically conscious and that it had been a waste trying to educate decadent bourgeois elements like that. I suggested the contact was interesting on the human level; Osama, the Lebanese boy, said the cause was not harmed; someone else interjected that we had had a good time.

And all this, for God's sake, actually went into the minutes of the 42nd meeting of the "Ittihad" cell of the Parti Syrien Nationaliste in the city of Beirut on May 12, 1957.

Shortly after that I graduated from high school and was granted a scholarship to study in England where I stayed for three and a half years.

3. Damascus and the Desert

I returned to the Middle East more embittered, more disillusioned, more unhappy than when I left. There was a rage within me. An anger. A hate. A fury that was almost animal in its intensity.

I had been cheated by the world, by the gods, and by history. Knowing of the agonies of men from more devastated worlds, with more crippling experiences, did not humble me. Knowing that others had suffered more in the past in Nagasaki and gas chambers; that others were suffering more in the present in massacres and wars in Africa and the East; that others will suffer more in the

Chapter 3

WOMEN AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

IN THE SIXTH CENTURY C.E. ARABIA FORMED, AS IT were, an island in the Middle East, the last remaining region in which patrilineal, patriarchal marriage had not yet been instituted as the sole legitimate form of marriage; although even there it was probably becoming the dominant type of marriage, the evidence suggests that among the types of marriage practiced was matrilineal, uxorilocal marriage, found in Arabia, including Mecca, about the time of the birth of Muhammad (circa 570)—the woman remaining with her tribe, where the man could visit or reside with her, and the children belonging to the mother's tribe—as well as polyandrous and polygamous marriages.

Neither the diversity of marriage practices in pre-Islamic Arabia nor the presence of matrilineal customs, including the association of children with the mother's tribe, necessarily connotes women's having greater power in society or greater access to economic resources. Nor do these practices correlate with an absence of misogyny; indeed, there is clear evidence to the contrary. The practice of infanticide, apparently confined to girls, suggests a belief that females were flawed, expendable. The Quranic verses condemning infanticide