

Palestinians and Lebanon: The Common Story

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This article offers two models of the future pattern of interaction between Palestinians and Lebanese. One, based on the similarities of culture and outlook, promotes a sense of 'community and integration', and the other, concentrating on the aftermath of thirty years of civil conflict, emphasizes the dangers of 'conflict and mutual oppression'. The article divides the history of the Palestinians in Lebanon into four periods: dispossession and adaptation (1948–1967); ascendancy of the PLO in Lebanon (1965–1982); the decline of the PLO (1982–1991); and the present 'era of the peace process'. In the final section, the author stresses again the common characteristics and experiences which unite Palestinians and Lebanese and asks whether such a basis can be used to promote, at last, a just and equitable solution for both communities.

Introduction: The View From Marjayoun

There was a time not so long past when Lebanon and Palestine were not separated. Only 80 years ago, neither Lebanon nor Palestine were the political-territorial entities that their contemporary masters insist enjoy ancient historical-mythological legitimacy. During the Turkish administration there were no borders or checkpoints, no sovereign states with their 'security dilemmas,' no chauvinistic nationalisms. The Mediterranean coast from Latakia to Jaffa was a single administrative district—the Vilayet of Beirut—except for the semi-autonomous Mutasarifiyya of Mount Lebanon which covered the rugged mountainous area from just north of Saïda to just south of Tripoli.

People who lived in Marjayoun (in Lebanon) travelled easily southwards into what became Mandatory Palestine. They had picnics in Tiberias, bought land in Beisan, intermarried with cousins in Nazareth. To people in Galilee, Lebanon was attractive for its mountain resorts and the cosmopolitan charms of Beirut. Had Faisal's Arab kingdom survived its infancy, perhaps things would not be so different today. But the arrival of the French and the British after 1918 and the gradual implantation of the Zionist project marked the beginnings of a partition between the two areas that would harden and finally—since the 1960s—fester with nearly continuous bloodshed. Even so,

traces of the earlier integration remain. A family that I know well, with branches in Marjayoun, Nazareth, Jerusalem and Beirut, is a living example of the seamlessness of a society that today seems irrevocably divided into antagonistic political camps. In this particular family, ascertaining one's political identity can be a puzzle. If you were born and brought up in Jerusalem to a mother from Bethlehem and a father from Tripoli, then forced to migrate to Beirut after 1948, you love Lebanon but you fully support the Palestinian cause. But what do you call yourself: Lebanese or Palestinian? It may depend on the company in which you find yourself. You have a Lebanese identity card but you have a brother, aunts, uncles and cousins in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Nazareth (not to mention throughout the Palestinian diaspora: in Jamaica, Baltimore, Kansas City, Kuwait, and Amman). And there are still cousins holding out in Marjayoun. During the troubles of the 1980s, these cousins, and others in Nazareth, made it possible for a family member in Beirut to make the land journey from Lebanon to Israel to the West Bank to visit his sisters—a kind of 'underground railway' paved with bribes and *wasta* (influence) (see Shammās 1986 for an evocation of the complex family relationships in this troubled area).

Rosy reminiscences of an earlier, more peaceful era might suggest to those with a sense of history that today's deep cleavages between Palestinians and Lebanese are not carved in stone. But to many Lebanese and Palestinians burned by the conflicts of the last 30 years, they will seem irrelevant. Another but much darker view from Marjayoun is offered by the Anglo-Lebanese writer-politician Cecil Hourani, whose father came from the town. Traumatized and enraged by the takeover of southern Lebanon in the 1970s by the Palestinian resistance organizations, he bitterly describes how the Lebanese authorities abdicated their national responsibilities in the face of Palestinian arrogance, venality and stupidity, thus subjecting the south to years of devastating Israeli reprisals. So oppressive were the Palestinians, writes this onetime supporter of the Palestinian cause, that the Israelis soon came to be seen by beleaguered Lebanese as saviours.

Thus of the transformation of Israel from 'enemy' into 'friend' in the minds of the people of Marjayoun and the whole area under the command of Major Haddad, I was the witness (Hourani 1984: 173).

The Lebanese sociologist Ahmad Beydoun has observed that the Palestinians, of all the parties, have come in for the greatest share of Lebanese bitterness and are widely blamed as the party responsible for what happened in Lebanon: 'the Palestinians committed enough errors that one might almost say they appointed themselves to this role' (Beydoun 1992: 52).

Modern history thus offers two models of the Lebanese-Palestinian relationship: community and integration, on the one hand; conflict and mutual oppression, on the other. Today, both Lebanon and the Palestinians are earnestly striving for reconstruction and renewal, each having suffered

devastating injuries at the hands of Israel, of each other, and (if truth be told) through self-inflicted wounds as well.

Commonalities and Contradictions

Their differences notwithstanding, Palestinians and Lebanese do have a 'common story.' In addition to social, cultural, and ethnic similarity and intermingling, they have both fallen victim to the same adversaries and suffered common adversity. But every commonality seems to carry with it a contradiction.

Ethnographically speaking, it is quite difficult for outsiders to distinguish between Palestinians and Lebanese; more so, certainly, than between Saudis and Yemenis, or Syrians and Egyptians, let alone between Arabs, Turks, Iranians, or Israelis. If intermarriage may be considered a marker of integration, the intermarriage of Palestinians and Lebanese of the same religion is relatively unremarkable, less so than Muslim-Christian marriages in either Lebanon or Palestine. Herein, of course, is a clue to Lebanese-Palestinian tensions: 80 per cent or more of Palestinians in Lebanon are Sunni Muslim. The Palestinians' bloodiest confrontations in the civil war were with Maronite Christian and Shi'ite Muslim militias. While it may be hard to tell between a Palestinian and a Lebanese on a Beirut street corner, the contingencies of a conflict situation sensitize adversaries to the slightest differences. During the grimmer phases of the civil war, for example, how one pronounced the word for 'tomato'—the Palestinian way (*bandura*) or the Lebanese way (*banadura*)—at a roadblock, could be a life-or-death decision.

Overarching cultural similarities and an intertwined history make it possible to discern without irony a degree of 'brotherhood' (or at least 'cousinhood') between the two peoples. As parts of the community of 'Bilad al-Sham' (the former Ottoman province, encompassing contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine/Israel) Palestinians and Lebanese, as well as Syrians, Jordanians and Iraqis, exhibit enough similarities to have sustained the Arab nationalist project as well as other unity schemes, from Emir Abdallah's 'Greater Syria' to Nuri al-Said's 'Fertile Crescent' to the Syrian National Social Party's 'Syrian nation.' Just as a resident of Mosul does not feel a stranger in Aleppo or Damascus, and a resident of Homs feels comfortable in Tripoli, a resident of Marjayoun would not feel culturally out of place in (Arab) Nazareth or Bethlehem. Language (Damascus, or 'eastern', Arabic), similar social structures and values, and religiosity, and what I can only call a tolerance of sectarian diversity would, and still do, link Palestinians and Lebanese.

Lebanese and Palestinians also had much in common politically up until their collision in the 1960s. Activists who lived in what is now Palestine and Lebanon shared in the struggle against European colonialism and in articulating the aspirations of Arab nationalism (Khalidi *et al.* 1991: 55-58; Muslih 1988: 62-68). Independent Lebanon's 'National Pact' (*mithaq al-*

watani) ascribed to Lebanon 'an Arab face'; and the first post-independence regime of President Bishara al-Khouri brought Lebanon into the new Arab League as a founding member and in so doing officially embraced the Palestinian cause. Al-Khouri and his Destour bloc had mobilized the relatively inclusionist, liberal forces, and by reaching out to the disenchanting Sunni Muslims had fashioned a winning coalition. To be sure, the 'Christian nationalists' (as Phares (1995) has described them) resisted 'inclusion' in a Muslim region, fearing that they would be culturally obliterated. To the Christian nationalists, the Palestinian question was more a threat than a sacred cause, and they saw their natural ally in this affair as the Zionist movement—a like-minded 'minority.' But the relatively pro-Arab, pro-Palestinian tendency prevailed. Al-Khouri's successor, Camille Chamoun, was also known as a champion of the Palestine cause for much of his career, even at the cost of some Maronite support, until he came to see the Palestinians as part and parcel of a Soviet-sponsored Arab nationalist threat to Lebanon's very existence.

For their part, the Palestinians of the middle class (the non-refugee population) became integrated into the economic and social life of Lebanon, and by all accounts contributed significantly to the country's impressive growth and prosperity during the 1950s. Their contributions to the quality of Lebanese life in general—intellectual, cultural, economic—were hardly negligible. Palestinians played leading roles in Lebanese higher education and scholarship (especially at the American University of Beirut), medicine, journalism, banking, engineering and contracting. But these Palestinians were meticulously excluded from Lebanon's formal political arena. Most did not have citizenship, and of those that did only a few took up a political vocation. It is probably true that most Lebanese and most Palestinians preferred it that way, each for their own reasons. A certain mixing, even a certain congeniality between Palestinians and Lebanese was evident in the better-off quarters of Beirut, but we must not exaggerate the extent of this commonality when looking at the two communities in their entirety. In the domain of 'low politics,' as Johnson (1983: 185) has shown, Palestinian organizations doled out patronage to certain Lebanese clientelist networks, but there was also violent competition between Palestinian and Lebanese criminal gangs. In general, Palestinians, whose political concerns lay elsewhere, were politically marginalized; and there is no denying that a substantial sector of Lebanese political opinion saw those concerns as a threat to Lebanon's integrity. But for some other Lebanese political tendencies the Palestinians (marginalized or not) were a resource.

It is in the realm of 'communal security' that the Lebanese and Palestinians have the most in common: shared victimhood. Yet ironically, this common security problem has been the precipitating cause of their mutual antagonism. Lebanese and Palestinians are locked in what game theorists would describe as a 'prisoners' dilemma': although mutually antagonistic, they are bound together and confront a common adversary. The national aspirations of each have been challenged and damaged by the Zionist national project. If this point is blindingly obvious in the case of the Palestinians, it is no less applicable to

Lebanon. Lebanese who believe that the Palestinians alone are responsible for Israel continuing to occupy and disrupt one-tenth of their territory must ask themselves why Israel continues its occupation nearly 15 years after the PLO withdrawal, and whether Zionist designs on Lebanese water no longer exist (Beydoun 1996: 72–74). In the abstract, classical balance-of-power theory would predict that two relatively weak and threatened actors should band together to confront the stronger one. This has happened on certain levels at certain times, but more often than not the Israeli challenge has set the Lebanese and Palestinians at odds with each other.

Notwithstanding all the commonalities between Lebanese and Palestinians, there was an enormous impediment to peace and harmony between them: the deeply divided nature of Lebanon's society and its political system. 'National' unity in Lebanon was, and remains, a fragile construct, owing to politicized sectarian consciousness among the Lebanese. The divide between Christians and Muslims, exacerbated by the French involvement, created a certain political schizophrenia, with the Christians generally looking toward the West and the Muslims toward the Arab East. For the latter, Palestine was to become a burning issue requiring their support; but for many of the Christians it was a Trojan horse that might justify the permanent presence of hundreds of thousands of mainly Muslim Palestinian refugees. Moreover, there were sectarian divisions within the Christian and Muslim populations. The Maronite Christians, located in the mountains east and north of Beirut, were particularly wary of Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian intentions; while the Greek Orthodox, geographically and socially much more integrated with Muslims both in Lebanon and in neighbouring countries, were more supportive of those concerns. Among Lebanon's Muslims, the Sunnis were the 'core constituency' for the Arab and Palestinian causes, as were many of the Druze; the Shi'ites were less enthusiastic. On the Palestinian side, while there were no comparable vertical solidarity divisions, the lack of a stable, overarching governing system could only lead to erratic and undisciplined behaviour.

From a historical perspective, the factor that most fundamentally explains the estrangement of these two peoples is, paradoxically, another commonality: their common failure to develop solid, legitimate national institutions. For these are two 'nationalities', each of which lacks coherent governance. Nothing contributed so much to the present unhappiness as the insecurities generated on each side over the irrationality and instability of the other. Lebanon was at least a territorially defined place, but the Lebanese were—and are—deeply divided among themselves on many important public issues, none more so than the Palestinian question. The Palestinians are only in the earliest stages of having their national territory, and the 'government' of their far-flung populations has been fluid, to say the least, with the goal of 'liberating Palestine' frequently subordinated to more pressing concerns: community survival, competition with host sovereignties, internal factional and ideological rivalries, and the mobilization of regional and global support. If we ask Palestinians to tell their 'common story' with the Lebanese, they will

immediately seek clarification: which Lebanese? If we ask Lebanese to tell their 'common story' with the Palestinians, they will counter with the same point: which Palestinians? The lesson here, perhaps, is that Lebanese and Palestinians will each need to establish more coherent systems of governance—stronger, more democratic states—before they can restore their poisoned relationship to health.

The Story: Palestinian and Lebanese Perspectives

One convenient way of telling the story of the Palestinians in Lebanon is to divide it into four periods: 1948–1967 (dispossession and adaptation), 1965–1982 (ascendancy), 1982–1991 (decline), and 1991–present (the era of the 'peace process'). But to appreciate fully the difficulty of the present situation, each of these periods needs to be addressed from both Palestinian and Lebanese perspectives. To make matters even more complex, there are multiple perspectives on each side. Lebanese perspectives are formed by sectarian, class, and ideological positions. Among Palestinians, socio-economic standing (from refugees to millionaires) and ideological orientations (notably pan-Arabism, Marxism, and Islamism) certainly have shaped a variety of perceptions. And while Palestinian society is less sectarian than the Lebanese, Palestinian Christians appear to have had a more privileged experience in Lebanon than their Muslim compatriots. Is it possible, then, to speak of a 'common story' at all? The answer, in this writer's opinion, is yes, despite the problems. Broad agreement among Lebanese and Palestinians as to the historical record ('the facts of the matter') is possible, indeed necessary for any resolution of the problem. But it may not be enough. Without detouring into postmodern epistemological debates, we need to ponder whether the perceptual gap—the subjective dissonance—between (and among) Palestinian and Lebanese narratives overrides the value of any consensus by all concerned on 'the facts.'

The First Period: 1948–1967

Some 104,000 Palestinians fled from northern Palestine into Lebanon in 1948 (Sayigh 1979: 99). For the vast majority who became registered refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA), it was a traumatic uprooting. Lebanon was no promised land:

There were dirt and lice and bugs filling the village. In Palestine, if we had parasites we'd find a way to get rid of them. But they were used to it . . . (ibid.: 105).

Fawaz Turki was among those Palestinians who sought sanctuary in Lebanon:

As if life in a refugee camp was not sufficiently hard for the Palestinians, they were discriminated against on every level in Arab society. Before a refugee found and was accepted for employment, he was called upon to apply for a work permit. In

Lebanon, for example, where discrimination was most blatant, this was virtually impossible to come by . . . I was a teenager in Beirut when one day I arrived home at the camp . . . to discover that a group of drunken policemen had forced their way in and beaten up my mother and two sisters, apparently for failing to produce an identity card or UNRWA card or some other wretched document. That incident may be taken as marking the day I started to hate with a passion that was lunatic in its intensity . . . (Turki 1972: 40).

A little more than half of the Palestinians displaced to Lebanon remained permanently in the dozen or so camps operated by UNRWA around the country; of the Palestinian community in Lebanon, their conditions were the worst, their future the bleakest, and their attitudes the most negative toward Lebanon and the Lebanese. They particularly resented the measures taken by the Lebanese authorities to control movement and activities in and around the camps, and in the UNRWA schools (Sayigh 1979 Ch.3 *passim*, and pp.111–13, 133). For Palestinians outside the camps, the situation was brighter, especially for those from the middle class. Some 40,000 actually received Lebanese citizenship between 1948 and 1978. For many of them, particularly professionals skilled in engineering, medicine and the like, Lebanon offered opportunities and a good life. And for the politically active among them, Lebanon, despite the efforts of the Deuxième Bureau (the state military-security forces) to suppress political activity, offered room for manoeuvre.

During this period the Palestinians managed to stabilize themselves and regroup. While the relatively wealthy and skilled found Lebanon a land of opportunity, however, the overwhelming majority—poor, uneducated, unskilled—were in a hopeless situation, politically and economically repressed. By the 1960s, Palestinians in Lebanon were uniquely situated to energize the emerging Palestinian resistance movement: they possessed discontented, youthful ‘masses’ ready to be mobilized, and a sophisticated middle-class political elite ready to lead. And Lebanon itself, quite schizophrenic on the Palestine question, lacked the coherence either to suppress or to guide the organizations of the resistance.

Lebanese ‘schizophrenia’ and confusion regarding the Palestinian issue is evident in the conflicting attitudes and policies found in public opinion and governmental policy. ‘In the aftermath of the 1948 war,’ writes Phares, a sympathetic analyst of Lebanese Christian nationalism, ‘Lebanon welcomed tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees,’ (1995: 103) even though this mostly Muslim influx would destabilize the fragile political balance between the religious communities. There is much truth to this judgement. Lebanon’s ‘pro-Arab’ government fully subscribed to the common Arab stand in support of the Palestinians. The government provided support (albeit modest) for UNRWA and for the refugees: in 1966–67, for example, it was contributing around \$5.52 per refugee, which may be compared with Syria (\$19.00), Egypt (\$8.79), Jordan (\$4.56), and non-Arab states (\$24.30) (Hudson 1971: 320). On the other hand, Lebanon attempted to quarantine the Palestinians politically

and made it extremely difficult for them to obtain employment, fearing that it might lead them to remain in the country.

Lebanon was the host country least hospitable to Palestine refugees . . . Palestinians, constituting about 10 per cent of the total population, were viewed by the Lebanese ruling establishment as a threat to internal political and social stability . . . [R]efugees . . . were often exploited as cheap labor during periods when Lebanon's economy was booming . . . (Peretz 1993: 61).

Non-registered refugees, especially if they were Christian, received better treatment, however; Peretz notes that some 3,000 'mostly wealthy, Christian Palestinians' were given Lebanese citizenship during the regime of Camille Chamoun (1952–1958) (*ibid.*).

Public opinion was also divided. Lebanese differed strongly among themselves about their uninvited Palestinian 'guests.' Many, especially in the Muslim community and in Arab nationalist circles, welcomed and sought to help them. But, as Phares also notes, many did not. Indeed, some important Christian leaders strongly sympathized with the Zionist cause. A pact had been signed between the Jewish Agency and the Maronite archbishop of Beirut in 1946 and endorsed by Emile Eddé, the Maronite politician defeated by Bishara al-Khoury in the 1943 election. Insofar as the Palestinians, wittingly or unwittingly, were agents of pan-Arabism, they could only be seen as a 'fifth column' by Lebanon's Christian nationalists. Even their 'natural allies' in the Lebanese Sunni Muslim community and in secular/Arab nationalist/left-wing political circles could appreciate the delicacy of the situation. The tensions within the Lebanese position are evident in the actions of General Fuad Shihab and his protégé Charles Helou (1958–1970). As 'victor' in the 1958 civil war, Shihab turned Lebanon's foreign policy in a more pro-Arab direction, and yet his regime cracked down ruthlessly on the nascent Palestinian resistance activity against Israel (Kabbara 1988: 300).

Another source of Lebanese ambivalence was the Palestinians' growing economic power in Lebanon. On the one hand, Lebanon had benefited economically from the creation of Israel. First, the port of Beirut lost a competitor in the port of Haifa for the increasingly lucrative markets of Arabia. Lebanon also obtained a new supply of low-cost labour. Henry Eddé (an engineering consultant and nephew of former president Emile Eddé) is reported to have remarked:

We did not welcome the Palestinians with open arms or take them to our hearts. We did not make available to them the most basic necessities of life—neither water, nor electricity, nor drainage facilities, nor roads, nor social services. It is we who deliberately put them near urban areas and not on the frontiers, in response to the wishes of businessmen for cheap labor . . . (Petran 1987: 74).

On the other hand, Lebanese economic interests feared competition from autonomous Palestinian financial institutions and companies. This fear, and the intersection of domestic and regional concerns, is dramatically illustrated

by the collapse of Intra Bank in 1966. Intra, then Lebanon's largest private bank, was headed by Yussif Baydas, a Palestinian who had come to Lebanon after 1948, married a Palestinian woman and obtained Lebanese nationality. Baydas' aggressive operations appear to have alarmed important Christian and Western financial interests. It is believed by many that his alleged use of Intra to finance Palestinian resistance groups against Israel caused the government to engineer a run on the bank and then keep the Central Bank from rescuing it (Kabbara 1988: 306).

Ambivalence thus marks Lebanese perspectives on the Palestinian presence during the first phase of this increasingly unhappy relationship. As we have seen, on the other side the feelings were also mixed.

The Second Period: 1965–1982

At some point between January 1965, when the first Palestinian commando crossed from Lebanon into Israel, and 'Black September' 1970, when tens of thousands of Palestinian guerrillas fled from King Hussein's army into Lebanon, the political balance between Palestinians and Lebanon changed profoundly. Filling a vacuum left by the defeat of three Arab states at the hands of Israel in June 1967, and energized by a symbolic 'victory' over Israeli forces at Karamah in the Jordan valley in March 1968, the Palestinian resistance movement was rising fast in popularity and power. At the same time, however, the Lebanese political system was beginning its slide into crisis.

The event that defines the Palestinian ascendancy is probably the Cairo Agreement of 13 November 1969. Signed by General Emile Bustani, the commander of the Lebanese army, and Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO, the agreement sought to regulate the increasingly strained relations between the Palestinians and Lebanon. For over a year Lebanese civilians (as well as Palestinian guerrillas) had been suffering from Israel's fierce retaliations following Palestinian incursions and hijackings. The most dramatic of these retaliations occurred on 28 December 1968, when Israeli commandos destroyed thirteen civilian airliners belonging to the Lebanese national carrier, Middle East Airlines, at Beirut international airport. The text of the agreement stated that Palestinian armed struggle served Lebanon's interests 'for it serves the interests of the Palestinian revolution and all the Arabs.' But it also asserted that the Lebanese authorities 'will continue to exercise their full rights and responsibilities in all areas of Lebanon under all circumstances' (Picard 1996: 86). On its face, the agreement signed in Cairo was little more than 'an agreement to disagree', because the positions of each party were essentially restated without recognition of the incompatibility of those positions. But the real significance of the Cairo Agreement was that it effectively legitimized the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon and also legitimized Palestinian commando operations, albeit nominally in coordination with the Lebanese government. Its implicit capitulation to Palestinian military power may explain why it was signed in secret and by the military only, not by any Lebanese

civilian leader. After the signing, the Palestinians continued to harass Israel, Israel continued to retaliate massively, and Lebanese suffering only increased. This pattern has continued, of course, to the present day.

The fundamental issue underlying today's bitterness between Lebanese and Palestinians is the extent to which the rise of the Palestinian resistance described above caused the collapse of the Lebanese polity and the ensuing bloody civil war. Maronite nationalist opinion places most or all of the blame on the Palestinians, a view which has come to be shared by parts of the Shi'ite and Sunni establishment as well. Palestinians and their remaining Lebanese supporters—now confined to the weakened secular/left/Arab nationalist circles—insist that Lebanon faced serious political difficulties for reasons that were essentially internal: the failure of Shihabism to build a modern state and address the growing social tension; the rise of Shi'ite populism; and the ineffectiveness, parochialism, and lack of unity of the political establishment. Analysts have also differed in apportioning the blame: some, like Harik (1981), tend to give more weight to external causes, especially the Palestinian factor; others, like Petran (1987), emphasize domestic socio-economic and sectarian factors. Most would probably agree with Hanf, who sees the 'importation' of the Arab-Israeli conflict into Lebanon as a powerful impetus toward Lebanon's collapse but who also insists that '[t]he irresponsibility of the Lebanese political class prepared the grounds for this disaster' (Hanf 1993: 177).

After almost two decades of political passivity, the Palestinians in Lebanon began to take control of their affairs and also, inevitably, to involve themselves in Lebanese politics to a degree that Lebanese nationalists found increasingly alarming. This could not have happened had the Palestinians not enjoyed intense support from important sectors of the Lebanese population. As Sayigh has observed, there had long been solidarity between the Palestinian and the Lebanese 'nationalist left,' including (on the Lebanese side), the Arab Nationalists' Movement, the Syrian National Party (PPS), the Ba'ath, and the Lebanese Communist Party (Sayigh 1994b: 25–26). In the critical year 1969, the Palestinians had widespread backing from Lebanese in the coastal cities, especially among the poor and middle classes, and from the Sunni and, to a lesser extent, the Greek Orthodox and Shi'ite communities. The first clash between the Lebanese army and Palestinian guerrillas took place in south Lebanon in April, and the resulting political protest among these pro-Palestinian Lebanese led to the resignation of the prime minister, the retreat of the Deuxième Bureau from Palestinian camps, and finally to the Cairo Agreement. Shortly after that agreement was concluded, the Beirut newspaper *Al-Nahar* published an opinion poll showing that 85 per cent of the Lebanese sampled, favoured wholeheartedly or with reservations Palestinian commando operations in general (Hudson 1978: 264).

With financial support from Iraq, Syria, Libya, the Arab Gulf states, and the dispersed Palestinian community in exile, the Palestinian resistance grew rapidly, especially in Jordan and Lebanon. More acts of armed struggle led to

ever sterner Israeli reprisals. The spread of the Palestinian infrastructure began to encroach on Lebanese state authority. 'The heart of the PLO's problem in Lebanon [was that] any growth of its local strength only multiplied its enemies' (Khalidi 1986: 23). When the Palestinian forces threatening King Hussein's regime were finally expelled from Jordan in 'Black September' 1970-71, they regrouped in Lebanon and strengthened the Palestinian presence there. To many Palestinian leaders, especially in left-wing groups like the Popular Front (PFLP) and the Democratic Front (DFLP), the lesson of Black September was that the resistance must form grass-roots linkages with local political forces: having failed to do this in Jordan made it easier for the King's army to defeat them, therefore it was important to have Lebanese allies. Subsequently, it indeed proved useful to the Palestinians to have had Lebanese allies; but there was a heavy price—the perception among Lebanese that the Palestinians were interfering in Lebanon's internal politics.

The Palestinian resistance continued to grow, managing to survive a series of military confrontations between 1973 and 1976 with the Lebanese army, Christian Lebanese militias, and even the Syrian army.

PLO Chairman Yasser 'Arafat was now a head of state in all but name, more powerful than many Arab rulers. His was no longer a humble revolutionary movement, but rather a vigorous para-state . . . Its role in Lebanon had also changed profoundly, as had Lebanese attitudes toward it (Khalidi 1986: 29).

The first Lebanese groups to react to 'the Palestinian threat' were the Maronite Christian groups. Membership in Al-Kata'ib Al-lubnaniyyah (the Lebanese Falangist Party) rose from 36,000 in 1964 to 65,000 in 1971 (Entelis 1974: 105-06). In the years immediately following Black September the Christians

were already arming themselves rapidly, smuggling in M16 rifles, Czech M58 rifles and other small arms, and spending their evenings in arms drill (Sampson 1977: 17).

They may have spent \$200-600 million on such armaments, with the funds possibly coming from looted banks, the CIA, West German financiers and the Shah's Iran (ibid.: 17-21). Violent clashes between Christian militias and Palestinian forces in April 1975 precipitated the civil war, and by the end of 1976 the militias had overrun the Palestinian camps of Tel al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Pasha in eastern Beirut. But they were unable to dislodge Palestinian and Lebanese National Movement forces from the central Beirut business and hotel district.

In southern Lebanon, Christian and Shi'ite villagers were both humiliated and endangered by Palestinian forces which were now dominating the region, with the apparent consent of a government in Beirut that had never done much to win the hearts and minds of these long-neglected southerners. The Palestinian-Lebanese Shi'ite relationship was a complicated one. Palestinian organizations had successfully recruited Shi'ites into their ranks for several years. At the same time, however, Palestinians competed with Shi'ites in the

local labour markets, engendering resentment. Countless incidents of harassment and humiliation at the hands of Palestinian resistance organizations eroded the support once accorded to them. Initially, the Israelis were quite inept at exploiting the growing antagonism, but eventually were able to take advantage of it. Thus, when Israel launched its first invasion of southern Lebanon in 1978, it was able to leave behind a pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian militia and population in place; and during its full-scale invasion of 1982 it was welcomed as a liberator from the abusive Palestinians who were being driven northward to be besieged in west Beirut. The Palestinians had enjoyed widespread support across the Lebanese political spectrum from the mid-1960s until the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. Even after 1975, Lebanon's Sunni leaders continued to support the Palestinian resistance. But by 1982, when Israel launched its invasion of Lebanon, the Palestinians had lost a great deal of that support. On the Christian side there was outright hostility. An analyst reflecting the Christian nationalist perspective could write that:

The Palestinian strategy was to overthrow the Lebanese government and replace it by a local coalition favoring the PLO and serving its goals. The Lebanese republic would then be a legal cover for a Palestinian-controlled state (Phares 1995: 109).

The rancour was not confined to Christian nationalists. The Sunni Muslim prime minister, Shafiq Wazzan, explained the relations of Palestinians and Lebanese as a parable:

There were two brothers living near each other. A guest arrived and asked for shelter. One brother closed the door; the other was more tolerant, and invited the guest in. The guest stayed longer than anticipated. He then brought his wife, and then his cousins, and then even his friends. While originally he had occupied a little corner of the three bedroom house, he soon took over most of the house and was knocking at the master bedroom. This is our story with our brothers the Palestinians (cited in Salem 1995: 60).

Little matter that by 1982 the Palestinian 'economy' in Lebanon was generating more than 15 per cent of the Lebanese gross national product, and that the PLO and affiliated institutions had created 10,000 jobs directly and 30,000 indirectly, and that it was spending more than \$300 million annually on its military forces and those of its Lebanese allies. By one estimate 'the entire PLO budget by that time may have been larger than that of the Lebanese state itself' (American Task Force for Lebanon 1991: 48). Little matter that Palestinian leaders by 1975 felt that there was an American-Israeli plot to strangle their resistance movement in Lebanon: American diplomacy after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war indicated as much, as did the rise of anti-Palestinian Christian militias, supported by the US and Israel. For their part, Lebanese Christian leaders had their own fears—virtual mirror images, indeed, of Palestinian nightmares: US Secretary of State Kissinger, it was widely

believed, was secretly planning to 'liquidate' the Palestine problem at Lebanon's expense by discreetly encouraging a Palestinian mini-state in southern Lebanon.

The Third Period: 1982-1991

Israel's invasion in 1982 and its occupation of half the country effectively terminated the Palestinian para-state in Lebanon. It also allowed for a brief renaissance of Maronite Christian hegemony. But it failed in its twin goals of liquidating the Palestinian resistance movement for good, and installing a durable client regime in Beirut. Nevertheless, the Palestinians' moment in Lebanon was over, and they paid the price for years of arrogance. Unfortunately, that burden was to fall most heavily on Palestinian civilians, most of them refugees. The month-and-a-half Israeli siege of Beirut ended with an American-brokered withdrawal of Palestinian forces. Owing to the premature departure of a US/French/Italian/British multinational force intended to protect the remaining unarmed Palestinian civilians, many hundreds of them in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps were massacred by Christian Lebanese Forces militiamen, enraged by the assassination of their President-elect Bashir Gemayel, with at least the tacit approval of Israeli units positioned directly outside the camps. It was a bloody foretaste of hard times to come for the Palestinians in Lebanon.

The departure of Arafat and the official PLO forces left over 350,000 civilian Palestinians, most of them refugees, and a residual group of fighters who either had refused to withdraw along with Arafat or else were allied to dissident Palestinian organizations. While these fighters maintained a certain presence, notably in the camps around Saida (Sidon), they could not provide adequate protection. Squeezed between the Israeli occupying forces and the Lebanese Forces Christian militia, most Palestinians in Lebanon now worried about survival, not 'revolution until victory.' Worse was still to come in the form of the Shi'ite movements and Syria's return to a position of hegemony.

The civil war and the 1982 Israeli invasion had energized a broad coalition of Lebanese 'progressive' forces, including the Communists and other left-wing nationalist organizations. The Lebanese Shi'ites were also mobilized; now in addition to the Amal movement there was Hizballah. Both began to mount resistance to the Israeli occupation; but neither, especially Amal, was well-disposed to the Palestinians. As the harassed and demoralized Israelis began a phased withdrawal from central Lebanon, the government of President Amin Gemayel weakened to the point that it could no longer support the peace treaty with Israel that it had signed under Israeli and American pressure on 17 May 1983.

Syria, which had adamantly opposed the treaty, was now able once again to write a script for Lebanon: in December 1985 it proposed a 'Tripartite Agreement' between the Shi'ite Amal movement, the Druze Progressive

Socialist Party, and the Christian Lebanese Forces, now commanded by a pro-Syrian leader. The Syrians, Sayigh (1994b: 152) argues, sought to marginalize the secular parties and the Lebanese Sunnis, all of whom had been allied with those Palestinian organizations dominated by Arafat, from which the Asad regime had been estranged since the beginning of the civil war.

The stage was now set for 'the war of the camps.' One of the most brutal episodes in a brutal civil war took place between 1985 and 1987, when the Shi'ite Amal militia, supported by Syria, besieged the battered Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Saida, and Tyre. Some of the fiercest combat took place in the camps of Sabra, Shatila, Mar Elias, and Burj al-Barajneh in the southern suburbs of Beirut. The human tragedy has been described by several foreign participant-observers, notably Sayigh (1994b), Giannou (1992), Cutting (1988), and Wighton (1990). Casualty estimates vary widely. Brynen (1990: 190) suggests a total death toll of around 2,500. But Sayigh (1994b: 320) notes that official death statistics for the country as a whole came to over 13,000 for this period when the camp battles were the main arena of conflict. Many more were displaced. After a long and desperate struggle, which both restored unity among the divided Palestinian factions, and renewed some international sympathy for the Palestinians, Amal failed to destroy the camps. Many Lebanese, even some in the Shi'ite community, condemned Amal's campaign. However, for the Palestinians it meant the end of the support base they had enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s. Having clashed in 1975-76 with the then-dominant Maronites, the Palestinians had now alienated much of the country's largest sect, the Shi'ites. Little was left.

In general, the Lebanese were relieved to see the destruction of the Palestinian 'para-state.' But those who thought that Lebanon's troubles were over, were to be disappointed. Battles between Christians and Druze, and internal feuds within the Maronite and the Shi'ite communities, broke out even as the Palestinians were disempowered and the Israelis were withdrawing. Christian hostility began to soften as the Palestinians weakened, and some Maronites must have entertained some positive views toward those that were resisting a Syrian-Shi'ite move to take over the country. Despite such modulations of hostility, most Lebanese were determined that the Palestinians should never again be allowed to act outside the authority of the Lebanese state. Finally, in October 1989 the surviving members of the 1972 Lebanese parliament signed 'The National Accord Document' in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, paving the way for an end to the civil war. While the Ta'if Accord mainly spells out political reforms for Lebanon, it has several provisions pertinent to Palestinians in the country: a ban on their naturalization; the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias; and the extension of state authority over all its territory, including the refugee camps. In short, the Lebanese were insisting that the situation of the Palestinian 'guests' in their country must revert to the controlled and separate status that had prevailed between 1948 and the mid-1960s.

The Fourth Period: 1991–Present

For Palestinians in the diaspora, especially in Lebanon, 1991 was a black year. Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 had culminated in 'Desert Storm,' the American-led war against Saddam Hussein to liberate Kuwait and reduce Iraq to a negligible power in the region. Palestinians had supported Saddam Hussein for his anti-Israeli stance. While technically the PLO had not supported the invasion of Kuwait, the indelible perception was that Arafat had tilted in favour of the Iraqis at a crucial point. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait and other Gulf countries. Palestinians in Lebanon (and elsewhere) were affected as the flow of remittances from their relatives in the Gulf was cut off. The PLO was ostracized by its wealthy supporters in the Gulf and driven to virtual bankruptcy. Deep divisions emerged within Palestinian ranks between those who supported Kuwait and Desert Storm and those who did not.

Given this new weakness and disarray among the Arabs, the time was propitious for the United States to launch a comprehensive Arab–Israeli 'peace process' at Madrid. The 'Madrid process,' masterminded by the American Secretary of State James Baker, got off to a promising start but eventually began to falter. Prospects brightened after the election of a Labour government in Israel in June 1992, but once again the negotiating process became bogged down. Matters were not improved by the election of Bill Clinton and the Democratic Party in the American presidential elections, owing to the new Administration's very strong pro-Israel stance. But secret talks between the PLO and Israel that had begun in Norway were successful, producing the famous Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. For Palestinians in the occupied territories, hopes were high for a phased achievement of self-rule and the ultimate prospect of a Palestinian state. But for Palestinians in the diaspora the 'Oslo process' promised little. While the 1967 war refugees were at least mentioned in the DOP, there was no direct attention to the original refugees from 1948, who made up the large majority of the Palestinians in Lebanon. The question of refugees was addressed in two ways: through one of the regional multilateral working groups, and as an agenda item for the 'final status' negotiations. For diaspora Palestinians neither was very satisfactory: they did not want to be lumped in with numerous other refugee problems in the multilateral venue, nor did they want to wait for a final status negotiating forum in which the Israelis could effectively veto any unwelcome proposals, and which seemed to dilute the legal basis of the right of return inscribed in UN resolution 194 of 1948.

Palestinians in Lebanon are embittered and disillusioned at the turn of events. The idea of 'return', which seemed to them a real possibility from the mid-1960s up to 1982, has faded, and even the prospect of compensation for seized land and property seems remote. At the same time, they cannot escape the hostility displayed by the Lebanese authorities and a wide spectrum of

Lebanese opinion. Much of their anger is directed at Arafat. As a Shatila camp resident put it:

The Palestinians in Lebanon carried the revolution while our brothers in the Occupied Territories slept. We sacrificed everything and now Abu Ammar [Arafat] used our blood to make himself an autonomous kingdom. We did not know that when the PLO was evacuated from Lebanon in 1982, it meant that they were also abandoning us here as well (Cited in Sosebee 1996: 22).

The Lebanese, for their part, are trying with difficulty to restore their country, after a catastrophic conflict for which many blame the Palestinians. One of the few things that most Lebanese politicians agree on is that the Palestinians should leave. In April 1994 Foreign Minister Faris Buwayz advocated 'redistribution' of the Palestinians as follows: 20 per cent to Gaza or Jericho, 25 per cent to join their families wherever these might be located; and the rest to countries with space for immigrants (Sayigh 1994a: 19–21). In August 1995, when Libya announced it was expelling Palestinians, Lebanon would initially accept only 400 of them, although some 2,000 of the estimated 10,000–15,000 of the Palestinians in Libya with Lebanese travel documents actually arrived (*The Lebanon Report* 1995: 10). At the time a government official was quoted as describing Palestinians as 'human garbage' (*Shaml* 1995: 6). Subsequently the government imposed new visa requirements for Palestinians (Shiblak 1995: 42–43). The Lebanese army, meanwhile, has extended its controls around the large refugee camps. President Elias Hrawi has said that since the Palestinians now have their own territory, Lebanon cannot accept the permanent settlement of refugees. Government officials and the commercial elite feel that the refugees are getting in the way of reconstruction—literally, in the case of a new sports complex being built practically on top of the Shatila camp (Sosebee 1996).

Today, according to Palestinian analysts (*Tanmiya* 1996: 4), unemployment among the 350,000–430,000 Palestinians in Lebanon is between 50 and 65 per cent of the labour force. Work permits cannot be obtained. Health conditions are 'awful' now that the Palestinian Red Crescent Society is 'paralysed' and UNRWA services have been cut back. Building permits in and around camps are denied. Educational levels, once impressive, have deteriorated drastically: three out of every four pupils drop out after intermediate level. Remember, however, that the situation of many Lebanese is little better. There are perhaps one million Lebanese classified as 'poor' and 250,000 of them are 'extremely poor.' Twenty-eight per cent of Lebanese families live below the poverty line. In the urban centres of Beirut, Tripoli, Saida, Tyre and Zahleh (where for the most part Palestinians are also concentrated) there may be 750,000 'poor' Lebanese, of whom 90,000 are 'extremely poor' (Haddad 1996: 36).

How Will This Story End?

The days when being 'Palestinian' or 'Lebanese' was secondary to other more meaningful identities are long gone. Their restoration would require over-

coming the competing nationalisms, sectarian chauvinisms, patronage networks, bureaucratic politics, regional security dilemmas, and global interests that have set the two communities against each other.

To the naive outsider, it still seems bizarre that the original commonalities have been forgotten and that the victims are fighting each other instead of joining together to combat the forces that brought them to this miserable condition. Narrow self-interest has replaced generosity; rationality has degenerated into paranoia. Yet there remain profound commonalities between Lebanese and Palestinians. Both sides agree fervently on the Palestinians' right of return—the Palestinians want to go home and the Lebanese don't want them to stay. Each has contributed to the well-being of the other in the past, and could do so in the future. Both have suffered immensely at the hands of Israel. Both crave the tranquillity and normality that only a comprehensive just peace can provide. Both enjoy a considerable measure of sympathy and support in the international community.

Diplomats and experts will offer alternatives ranging from *al-'awda* (return) to *tawteen* (naturalization) (Badwan 1996). They will try to discern what is 'possible' and 'realistic' under the present circumstances and test those findings against underlying principles and ideals. But those who think that 'realism' dictates essentially a *status quo* solution (or non-solution) should ponder the story told in this article. Just as those who thought themselves powerful at earlier stages could not shape a solution to their liking, those who are powerful at the moment are not powerful enough to do so either. The story is not over. The question is whether a solution that might restore the common ground between quarrelling Palestinian and Lebanese 'brothers' can be found.

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