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12. Scars of the mind. Trauma, Gender and Counter-memories of the Nakba

Ruba Salih

Safsaf, the village seven kilometres northwest of Safad where Subhiyya Salama found refuge, was attacked early in the morning of Friday 30 October 1948 by Haganah, Stern and Irgun Zionist paramilitary units. Arab armies refrained from joining the exiguous local resistance and fighters retreated too, leaving villagers to defend themselves.[i] The village was encircled from all sides. That night, between fifty and seventy men were shot and buried in a ditch, and several women raped and killed. Subhiyya survived this massacre.

Some time earlier, she had escaped her hometown along with many others seeking safety from the fury of war, as Jewish forces were attacking the surrounding villages one after another. Today, we know most villagers left out of grave fear. One terror tactic wielded by Zionist military organizations was to broadcast ghastly sounds of sirens, fire, moans, shrieks and wailing women—forewarnings of what could happen should Palestinians stay put.

Safsaf seemed safe, and Subhiyya and her family were generously welcomed and offered shelter for what they thought would be a temporary stay. Yet Jewish armies would soon reach Safsaf. Amidst chaos and horror, Subhiyya attempts to run from the imminent carnage, but the *Jaysh al-Inqadh* (Arab Salvation Army) is patrolling the area and sending villagers back. Subhiyya s sister-in-law, Nazha, is returning from the fields, unaware Safsaf has been attacked. She will lose her leg to a landmine planted around the village. Subhiyya s memory is fixed on this moment: she is carrying Nazha on her shoulders, she needs to get her away from the shelling and shooting, fast. But Subhiyya is young, barely more than a child. She cannot bear the weight of her sister-in-law s wounded body. In this fraught moment, Nazha begs Subhiyya to leave her behind and save the children, who are trapped in the house with no defence. Subhiyya is thus confronted with a dramatic choice: should she remain with Nahza, or run to the children s rescue? Israel'—Subhiyya recalls the Jewish militias as one with the state they would beget on the ruins of Palestinian villages and cities—was fast approaching, and time was running out. Subhiyya remembers leaving her sister-in-law languishing injured on the ground alone, and running to the children. She turns back to see Jewish forces stabbing Nazha in cold blood before the eyes of her mother, who dies of sorrow on the spot.

How does a survivor apprehend and remember the scale of violence, loss and erasure that Palestinians experienced during the Nakba, and continued to experience in its aftermath? And what lenses and approaches can the listener apply to such dramatic recollections of the 1948 war? In *The Drowned and the Saved,* Primo Levi reminds us that any reliving and retelling of traumatic memories is susceptible to fraud. Where perpetrators unconscious desire for exculpation provides incentive to deceive, victims are absolved: Anyone who suffers an injustice or an injury does not need to elaborate lies to exculpate himself of a guilt he does not have .[ii] Still, victims recollections can go adrift in other ways. Reminiscences of trauma can seem numb and unconvincing when treating the most cruel, excruciating events; yet richly detailed in regard to what might appear as bizarre or ordinary moments. Moreover, we tend to willingly forget the most gruesome details of illnesses from which we have recovered.

It is against this backdrop—specifically as far as questions of recovery and memory are concerned—that I shall situate the memories of Subhiyya Salamah and Amina Banat. I would like to suggest that these should be read as traumatic memories rather than through the canon of oral histories of the Nakba. The events these women witnessed and survived can be

fully remembered only at the cost of reliving unbearable pain; and yet they cannot, and must not, be forgotten. As Palestinians, they have not only endured violent mass expulsion and witnessed ferocious massacres; but also erasure from a history that privileges the perpetrators point of view—a history of fraud and omission. As refugees, their plight is ongoing, and their wound still open. There has been no recovery.

The phenomenon of trauma, as it emerges in personal recollections of the Nakba, invites close analysis because it both exceeds and confirms our habitual methods of historical enquiry. Trauma, Cathy Caruth reminds us, does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned . Recollecting trauma paradoxically elicits absolutely accurate and precise images that are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control .[iii] To become a narrative memory—a conscious and active form of recalling that feed the canons of historical validity—trauma must be verbalized and integrated into a larger existing discourse around historical events. In the case of the Nakba, this knowledge is framed in nationalist terms often oblivious to gendered micro-histories, and to the individual and hollow aspects of traumatic events. The argument here is that if the collective story of the Palestinian expulsion has gained increasingly widespread legitimacy, the subjective dimensions of this collective trauma remain obscure.

Alessandro Portelli suggests that oral history differs from other forms of remembering in that it tells us less about facts, and more about their meaning. The factual interest of oral records lies in the narrator's subjectivity: what she believes has happened, and the meaning she ascribes to events, constitute historical facts[iv]. The singular stories of Palestinian refugee women express not merely individual experiences of collective loss—of land, of home, of loved ones, of identity—but also personal traumas unfolding in a context where violent war and patriarchal oppression are variously intertwined. Their subjective memories engender a particular and oppositional narrative that enmeshes and juxtaposes private and public spheres.

Subhiyya and Amina bring to light a hidden history of female courage, physical resilience and creativity. When her husband makes for the border when fighting breaks out, leaving her stranded with their two small daughters, she pays Druze men to escort her to the Lebanese border on the backs of a donkey and camel, with the few belongings she could salvage. Amina astutely hides her valuables—two gold swing bracelets—in her baby s pillow; and later bargains with Jewish soldiers who demand her gold in exchange for crossing the border and securing water for her crying, thirsty infant. Men are nowhere remembered as heroic actors protecting women and children; rather, those not killed are tragic cowards running for their own safety (her husband), barring the path to families attempting to escape the carnage (the Arab army) or refusing water to thirsty children (a man at the border). Along the way, Amina looks out on a barren landscape of death and decay. She renders the carcass of a rotting animal with chilling precision, vividly likening worms to boiling rice in dirty, bloodstained well water too deep to reach and yet so precious. Her own resourcefulness prompts her to plunge her *mandil* into the bottom of the well and squeeze some water onto her hands.

Amina s experience of motherhood is a sequence of losses, paralyzing grief, sheer loneliness and waiting. Her two baby girls die in her arms, of unnamed illnesses, on the interminable, years-long journey in and out of temporary shelters. We assume she is eventually, somehow reunited with her husband in exile. Two years on, she gives birth to the first of five baby boys, four of whom will disappear in the Israeli carpet-bombing of Lebanon in 1982, their bodies never to be found. This suffering is too painful to remember as more than a series of flashbacks, but Amina s body remembers; she finds herself repeating gestures made seventy-one years ago, when caring for her ill children. A linear account of these events proves impossible to articulate; while the visceral, frightful snapshot of her husband s brain splattered on the walls remains impressed upon her memory. Another

sensory metaphor: Amina relates the multiple losses and separations which have marked her life as physical disappearances: They died and I did not see them . Subhiyya s ways of bringing certain images into words also demonstrates that her body has kept score of what she cannot process at a psychic level: we grasp the heaviness of the body Subhiyya had to carry, the food that was eaten, the thirst and loud cries of the children.

Amina s painting of life in Palestine before 1948 is a lively one in pastel colours, and far from mythical or romanticized. Her early years appear as fully fledged oral testimony, providing access not only to facts and events but to the meaning they held in her eyes. Her extraordinary memories of communal life in Shaykh Danun have been clearly processed and integrated in a narrative that compares the past to the present. Amina explains, we were living the natural way [...] living a slow life . Human temporality was harmonized with the rhythms of the natural world, and human and non-human life enmeshed such that cacti and watermelons were cared for like babies in wombs. Subhiyya s re-enactment of the Safsaf massacre is similarly interspersed with vividly memories of the rhythms and demands of peasant life, detailing ordinary chores to be attended to even as villages were being erased with bloodshed and wanton violence across Palestine. Subhiyya remembers her family harvesting olives—she even specifies the number of gallons produced—and cracking wheat.

Amina was eighteen years old when her village, Shaykh Danun, was attacked, and only fourteen when her parents gave her away in marriage to her maternal cousin. She guides us through her anguish: at the sight of the family coming to bring an end to her childhood, she runs away to hide in shock and shame. Nobody is interested in the little girl s feelings or desires: You won t get away with this! her mother angrily retorts. Her cousin wants her and the marriage is non-negotiable. Overwhelmed and possibly traumatized, Amina retreats to her childhood world with her friends, play-acting the domestic life soon to consign her to real motherhood and responsibilities. Amina makes sense of the abrupt extirpation of her childhood in a manner akin to a traumatic experience. Unable or unwilling to understand the reason for her predicament, she finds relief in the knowledge that it could be God s will.

After the war, Subhiyya s and Amina s oral testimonies shift to traumatic memories. These emerge as a sequence of flashbacks, their words still numb, as if uttered in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. In Amina s flashbacks, war is intertwined with forced marriage, as if personal trauma both anticipates and is transposed into collective trauma. The marriage marks a premature and harrowing end of her childhood, while the Nakba is the destruction of her entire world. In light of Primo Levi s insight that trauma can only be apprehended once a framework exists that can give meaning to the experiences—or, to use the metaphor of the illness, once recovery is completed—it is clear that the atrocities these women experienced have yet to be fully processed. Indeed, Amina and Subhiyya s oral accounts testify to injuries that are ongoing in their present lives, or wounds which still awaits recognition and reparation. The existing historical canvass, imbued with nationalist meanings, is what they are offered to inscribe and process the meaning of what they went through, but this canvass is both inadequate and unfinished. The ongoing actuality of the Palestinian tragedy entails not only the impossibility of curing the trauma by narrating or forgetting, but also the effacement of women s gendered and subjective traumatic experiences, which are subsumed under more imperative narratives of collective, national, catastrophe.

However, read in their own terms, as traumatic memories rather than simply as oral histories narrating subjective experiences of war events, Subhiyya s and Amina s accounts disrupt not only hegemonic Israeli renditions of 1948, but also a collective (and androcentric) rendition of Palestinian national history, with its focus on the collective dimension of displacement and dispossession. In these unprocessed traumatic memories,

we find seeds of what could be seen as counter-narratives. Both Subhiyya and Amina resist making their trauma legible through the trope of martyrdom. In a reversal of the nationalist convention that renders the national trauma—the loss of the country—as the paradigm according to which individual histories acquire or loose meaning, and to which they can never compare, Amina asserts that nothing can compare to or compensate for the excruciating pain of a mother who has violently lost her child. In her own poetic and political lyrics: If I told you that my country could compare to my children, I would be lying. A child is more precious than one s own soul. A mother is not more important than her child. As they say *I'd rather wish for death to have me and to spare my child*. As for my country, I could never forget it, and it remains in my thoughts, but not as much as my children. Even my husband who was martyred... Not as much as my children. Not even my sister, not as much as my children. Nor my brother, not as much as my children. My older brother who died, not as much as my children (starts to cry). And my sister died, and they all died, but none of them compare to my children. My children were born from my heart .

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[i] Nafez Nazzal in his oral history book reporting the massacre of Safsaf, reports that Israeli soldiers had entered Safsaf around sunrise and ordered the villagers to line up in a spot in the northern part of the village. One villager told Nazzal: As we lined up, a few Jewish soldiers ordered four girls to accompany them to carry water for the soldiers. Instead, they took them to our empty houses and raped them. About seventy of our men were blindfolded and shot to death, one after the other, in front of us. The soldiers took their bodies and threw them on the cement covering of the village's spring and dumped sand on them. In later days, Israeli troops visited the village, telling the inhabitants that they should forget what had occurred and could stay in their homes. But they began to leave under cover of the night towards Lebanon, about four at a time, until Safsaf was empty.

[ii] Levi, 1989: 26.

[iii] Caruth, 1995:151.

[iv] Portelli, 1981.

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Subhiyya Salama
born in al-Zahiriyya, Palestine

Interview with Mahmoud Zeidan, Ain al-Hilweh, 2006.

14 10–27 14”

Before the hostility began between you, were you friends with the Jews?

We were very close friends with them. We would visit each other and share meals together, and there were no problems between us at all. We were such close friends with them, but when the enmities started between us, it was over.

In what way were you friends? Did you have any Jewish friends?

No, I was not personally friends with them. It was the adults who were friends, like my uncle, for example, who was friends with them. Us kids did not get involved with them. But my uncle, bless his soul, was very good friends with them. He would bring basil and sell it to them, the plants with a stem and triangular leaves... He became very good friends with them.

Would you offer good wishes or visit each other on big occasions?

The adults would, not us younger kids. My older uncle would see them on big occasions, his children who were older than us would go as well. But there was no intermingling between us children.

At that time, did you feel there was hostility between you?

Yes, we did. There was this young Jewish boy who tell us Soon, you'll see . The Jews would say: We are ready to put money to kill a Muslim .

Where would they pay?

Jews collectively raised money through organizations. We had a feeling that sort of thing would happen.

Because they were collecting money?

Yes, they collected money because they knew a war would break out. They knew, but we didn't. We had no idea anything like this would happen, but they knew.

Who took you all [far from the town and the fighting]?

Our extended family did... The men in my family, and my brother-in-law, all of us. Each one of us moved his own family. The fighting went on all night between the Jews and Safad. At dawn, entire crowds of people were suddenly fleeing Safad, some were barefoot, some women were still in their nightgowns... Nobody went through the regular roads, we had to cross through the ditches. We escaped with those who were fleeing and we arrived to al-Jish. As soon as we arrived, a plane bombed al-Jish, and people got dispersed. We kept running until we arrived to Kafr Birʿim, where we stayed at a man's house... God bless him. We spent fifteen days at his house in Kafr Birʿim, just our family, not the rest of Dahriyya... And then we moved to Yarun, here in Lebanon. Kafr Birʿim is at the border, but Yarun is in Lebanon.

We stayed there about fifteen days as well, and then people started saying, Let's go back , and everyone wanted to go back. We took the bumpy roads back and we stayed under the fig trees in al-Safsaf. Then we moved from under the fig trees in al-Safsaf, into a house, with the help of the people from al-Safsaf whom we called *khwalna* (our uncles, our relatives).

Whose house?

We stayed at the house of the Yunis family. My sister-in-law, who was very strong, and my husband... I was still young, so I was scared to go back to [the groves and fields near] our village... So they would go out and harvest a bit of wheat and crack it. And when olive season came, they would go pick and press the olives. They harvested about thirty or forty oil gallons, and they were still not done [with the work], so they stored the gallons where I was living in Safsaf and went back to picking. When Safsaf fell... I was taking care of the children. Four of them were my brother-in-law's children, another four were my sister-in-law's children. All of them, and my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and I were in Safsaf, and they [my sister-in-law and my husband] had gone to Farrada. They had left the place where they were bringing back the olives and the oil from, and had gone from Farrada to Bint Jubayl. I stayed in Safsaf. My sister-in-law came back home with an amputated leg. She was attempting to go back to the village when her leg got cut off [from mines]. My mother-in-law is an older woman and my brother-in-law's children and my sister-in-law's children were all young. My sister-in-law's son was young like a basil stem. They [the Jews] took him away from among us. So I had to carry my sister-in-law on my shoulders, but I was so young and small, and she was big-boned and heavy, and I carried her for so long that my clothes got torn off. I tried to run here or there and they would say, Israel is coming this way . At the beginning, I carried her on my back so that we could run away with everyone who was fleeing, but *Jaysh al-Inqadh* did not let us leave. They said it was forbidden. So we went back to the initial house where we were staying in, and it got hit, so we got out through the window. We left and we found women sitting around with men and children and sat with them. The fighting went on all night long. I told my cousin's son Said, please go, leave. Maybe you can escape and we'll be alright staying here . The boy didn't move, he was eighteen years old. They [the Jews] showed up and took people away, that time they took forty men and lined them up and killed them. They took him and my sister-in-law's son as well, another one from our family.

What were their names?

One of them was Said and the other one, Saleh.

Salama?

Yes, Salama. No, they were Shahin... Said Shahin. Not from our family name, but his mother was one of us, she was my cousin. Said Shahin. The other one was Salama. Saleh Salama. So we left and stayed at that house for seven days, and two of the men they had shot were still alive, and they came crawling back to stay among us women. They were wounded.

How did the Jews enter Safsaf? How did you know these were Jews entering your village?

They just showed up. Just like you showed up here, at my doorstep, they showed up at our doorstep. When my cousin saw them, while I was carrying her on my back, she said, Please just throw me here and leave, go and be safe with the children . They showed up in front of us, just like that... So I dropped her off right there, and they came and killed her. As soon as I turned around I saw them stabbing her with knives.

They were stabbing the woman with knives?

They stabbed her with knives. No shooting or anything, and my aunt was standing right there and looking like this (mimes immobility), she was standing in front of her. She died of sorrow for her daughter.

What was her daughter's name?

Her name was Nazha.

Nazha Salama?

Nazha Salama.

But why did they kill her with knives?

Because of her leg...they assumed she was a fighter.

Did you witness them stabbing her with knives?

Yes of course, I barely had time to turn around that they were already stabbing her. So I left and took the children with me, to find safety.

What did you feel when you saw them killing her?

How do you think I felt? It was excruciating. I spent eight days crying. I did not raise my head, I did not eat, I did not drink. Not one drop of water. How do you think I felt, with all these small children with me, all of them crying? I suffered a lot... a lot.

When her mother saw them killing her...

When she saw her, she dropped dead. When they took away the young men, it was different, because they came to take them so we knew in advance [that they would kill them]. But with her, they had not touched her before. The mother died of sorrow at the sight of her slaughtered daughter.

So the mother died seeing her daughter...

She died, when she saw them stabbing her, she died for her daughter.

What was her mother's name?

Her name was Rima.

Rima Salama?

Yes.

When you saw them stabbing her with knives, where did you go?

I kept running and running. Israel showed up and I saw them. So I took the children, who didn't want to leave their grandmother and their aunt. I took the kids and walked up to the middle of town and stayed in a house where I found other women and men. My cousin's son

was with me, he was a young man. They came and took him from among us. And they took the other young man from among us too.

Were they gathering the young men?

They were, and they lined them up but I did not see them when they shot them.

Were they far from you?

Not really far, they were in the middle of town. They lined them up and killed them.

When they came to take the young men, did you have a feeling that they were going to kill them?

Of course we had a feeling. There were three brothers from Dar Yunis, three beautiful young men... Three young men died. One woman was so sad for her one and only brother who was from Safsaf [dreading they would take him]. So she took off her dress and put it on him, and she removed her scarf and put it on him. They came and took him. They found him out and they took him.

What was her name?

Bakriyya Yunis.

What was her brother's name?

I don't know.

So they took him.

They took him.

Would they come and search among the women?

Yes, they searched among the women, they came and took him from among the women.

Did they separate the women on one side and the men on the other?

No they didn't separate the women. They gathered us all together in one house, and started picking out each young man one by one and taking him away. They did not gather the men in one house. People stuck together out of fear.

Did you hear them shoot the young men?

Of course. The firing sounded like a rainstorm.

Did you hear of anybody getting killed in circumstances other than firing, or knives like how your cousin got killed?

No I did not hear of anything else, it was all by gunfire. I only heard of my cousin getting stabbed.

After they shot these young men, what happened in the village?

After they shot them, the women stayed together. Some of them fled during the night, and some of them stayed until the end, as they say. They had placed a guard to watch us in the village. He would take the elderly and let them slaughter [the meat] and he would bring them food.

How long did you stay after they killed the young men?

I stayed in Safsaf for seven days after the massacre.

Amina Banat
born 1929 in ʻAkka, Palestine

Interview with Bushra Moghrabi and Mahmoud Zeidan, Burj al-Barajneh, 2003.

9 04" to 21 45"

We never needed to buy any fruits or any vegetables. All our vegetables would grow in nature, and we were living the natural way. We didn't know any sickness, we didn't use any chemicals or anything. We were living a slow life. We would never hear about dangerous illnesses. We were just being, we were happy. One day, we did not know why, they said, War is about to break out, there will be skirmishes. Each individual must buy a rifle and keep it at home, in order to defend himself, in case something happens to us . That is what the elders said.

How big was your family? How many brothers and sisters were you?

Are you asking how many brothers I have?

Yes.

Three of them. One of them is blind, they got him in the eye when he was young and he lost his vision in both his eyes. He is still with us. I have one brother who is still alive. My older brother died, I did not see him. My mother died, I did not see her. My father died, I did not see him. I have two sisters, they died, I did not see them. I am here in Lebanon, all by myself. I do not have a brother, nor a mother, nor a father, nor anybody at all. I only have a son, here in Lebanon, and two daughters. Nobody else. Four of my children went missing in 1982. My husband received a projectile on his head while he was at home. His brains spilled on the ground and we buried him. And there I was, looking for my missing children.

Did the women work outside of the house, in your village?

Yes, on their own lands. Farmers would work on their properties. But people in cities were not farmers. They would buy from us farmers. My father used to pick figs for me, which I would bring down to Akka. He would harvest cactus fruit, enough to fill two crates. He would load them on a donkey for me, and I would ride it and bring everything over to the city. There was never any fear or any danger upon us.

Would you go on your own?

Yes I would. No, there were other people going there as well. But even if I was late and lagging behind them, I would not be worried. There would always be other people behind me. As soon as the Shaykh would sound the *Athan*, for *Fajr* prayer, we would go down to ʻAkka. We would be selling as of ten in the morning and then we d come back. We did not get around by car or anything.

How?

We rode our donkeys, excuse my language (the word *hmar* is also an insult). We would load our crates on the donkeys, and bring them down. And wherever there were streets, for example near the river, or near al-*Kabri*, or near a farm, a *manshiyeh* (oldest part of town).

Where there was a road, the car would come... There was a member of my family named Muhammad Banat Abu-Rashid. He was living in al-Rashidiyya, but he passed away, his children are still there. He used to have a pickup truck. He would charge by the trip, and would load up in the village and bring everything over to ʿAkka and display it at the fruit and vegetable market. And those in the villages, including myself, would pull out our boxes, and people would come and we would tell them, My okras are better...your okras are better...your tomatoes...your cactus fruits...your figs . This is how we were living, in Palestine.

What would you grow in your town?

We would grow everything. As I told you, cactus fruit was part of our produce, figs were part of our produce, and olives as well... If I had to tell you how many olive groves my father had, you wouldn't believe me. How many pieces of land... When my father would find a watermelon that had grown this big from the sun, he would dig a deep hole in the ground and bury it, leaving only the top side uncovered. We would put grass on it to protect it from the rays, so that it wouldn t ripen too fast. Later on, we would bring it out of the ground and it would be that big (gestures a huge size). We would try to fit the watermelon in a *khirj* (basket), and it would not even go through the hole. You don't know what a *khirj* is, do you?

Yes, I do.

We would put the watermelon inside it and it would not even get to the bottom of it. There were corn ears too. Imagine you were growing corn, and I wasn't. Or you were growing watermelon and I wasn't, or figs. I would come to you and pick out some of your produce, you would come and you wouldn't say anything other than, Enjoy your meal . Say you had watermelons and I didn't, and I came over to choose, you would not make me pay for it. Wild cucumbers, tomatoes... I would take a basket and pick out tomatoes from a brother's crops. And if you were the landowners and you saw me picking, you would not say anything to me. If you knew I did not have much, you wouldn't say anything. We were living in abundance. We would all sit and share the same meal. All the neighbours, and all the village women would sit together, and whatever each woman brought, they would offer it to you. There would be seven or eight women sitting in a circle over here, and another circle over there in another neighbourhood, and there in yet another neighbourhood... This is how they sat...at a common table. You would not think of your neighbour as a stranger. Same town, same brothers and sisters. Are we living that way now? No...here, even brothers wouldn't mind killing each other. We are living in oppression, here. What if I told you that we've been here for twenty-three years, and we barely have a drop of drinking water for the whole camp. And that throughout this whole camp, there is not one house that directly receives drinking water. We have to buy the water. It's been twenty-three years.

Hajjeh, who were the biggest land-owning families in your town?

The Rustum family. Their name was Rustum Abd al- Al, they used to own land. We did not associate being a farmer with being poor. If I counted my father's pieces of land, the ones I still remember, you would not believe me. That was my so-called poor father. Not really poor, only financially poor. Since my father did not have young men helping him, and he was alone—because we were four daughters first, until the boys were born...he did not have anybody to help him. He was not be able to cultivate the entire land. He would farm according to his needs.

Would the villagers help each other out with farming?

Of course, they would. Whoever was harvesting...say you were harvesting your wheat and I was done before you, I would come over and help you. Say I was still picking olives, and you were finished before me, you would come over and help me. Our family built a house, we did not have any wheel barrows, whoever was a construction worker would come and help me. This is how they were in 1948. I went back, I've been back three times. Whoever needed to build a house, but did not have any money... Whenever there was an evening gathering in town, people would create a *diwan*... A diwan is like a huge living room, where people set up sofas. Strangers who didn't know anybody came, as well as guest who might be lost or late to show up at their hosts. They would practice something called *nadafeh* in that living room. An example of *nadafeh* would be when someone would say, People! Umm Aziz wants to build a house and she does not have enough . And, three or four construction workers would step up and say, We will be there tomorrow . They would bring rocks. We will go help him tomorrow . So-and-so wants to pour cement tomorrow . We would go help them out. They would mix the cement, and place five or six ladders. Then, men would carry tanks on one shoulder, and women, on their heads... And that is how they would help whoever needed to pour cement for his house. Whether there were two or five rooms [to be built], they would help. This is how we would help each other in everything. We were together, even the British in our town... In Palestine, there were British people, I remember them. And there were Jews who would go from Nahariyya to Jiddin. They would pass through our town. They would see a child and say (welcoming gesture): Come, come . The child would go to them, and they would carry him, kiss him, and give him a biscuit, or candied almonds or money. So, every time we saw a Jew going to his town of Jiddin, in the mountains, we would run to him so that he could give us a biscuit or a candied almond, or a coin, and we would be happy. He would carry us and kiss us. It didn't matter if it was a little boy or a little girl.

There wasn't any enmity at the time.

There wasn't any enmity. To the point where, when the Jew came, as I said, kids would run towards him, and young and old would welcome him and salute him as if he were an Arab. We were living together with them. There was Tel Aviv, there was Nahariyya. I was born in Nahariyya. There were Jews living there. There was no enmity between the Arabs and the Jews. There were still Jews in Palestine in 1948, right? Well, there are many Palestinian men who married Jewish women. But a Palestinian woman never married a Jewish man.

So they would marry one of your villagers out to a stranger, then. It wasn't a problem, right?

Yes, I am from Shaykh Danun and I got married in Amqa. Who did I marry? My cousin on my mother's side. I am my husband's cousin, his aunt's daughter on his father's side, and he is my uncle's son, my mother's brother. My uncle came over. He came over, and he said, I want the girl and my mother gave me to them.I swear to God, when my father gave me, I had no idea. All I saw was them coming to read the Fatiha, and a group of men entering. My mother told me, Go get dressed . I said, Why? I was playing, I was just a fourteen-year-old girl, I was playing with my friend, her name was Fatmeh al-Khalid and there was also Nihaya al-Hanil. She [my mother] said, people are coming to read your Fatiha... To read my Fatiha? She said, People are coming, your cousin wants to get engaged to you, people are coming to read your Fatiha . As soon as she said that, there they were coming through the door. There were mangers behind the door, they had placed them there for the cattle to eat hay out of them. I got up, I was in a shocked state, so I went to hide behind the door. I didn't

want to see anybody, I hid behind the door. They started asking, Where is the bride? We want to see her already, we want to know what she looks like . They would say that if someone wanted to take [a bride] from another town, surely it must be better than from the hometown. I was not pretty. My sisters were very beautiful. I was not pretty. But my uncle would come over and say, I do like Amina, she has vigour, she is agile, I want her for my son . So my mother gave me away. So they kept asking, Where is the bride? while the bride was hiding and listening in on everything. They ended up reading the *Fatiha* and leaving, and they did not see me nor did I see them. When I came out, my mother said, Where were you? I said, I was hiding where the tables are . She said, You are not getting away with this. Why did you hide? I said, Because I don't want to see anybody . I swear, it was my wedding day, and my girl friends were there and there was cactus fruit... I went with these friends, the ones I was telling you about, Nihaya and Fatmeh. And I hope they can hear me saying this now. We went and made a house out of stones (gestures a circle), pretend houses. I made myself a house like this, she made a house over there, and she made one like that, and we took rocks and I said, This is my son and she said, This is my daughter ... And we made three houses next to each other, by playing with stones, and my hands and feet had henna on them and it was my wedding day. They were coming to get me at noon. People came to prepare me to be a bride, and my mother could not find me. She told my sister: Go call her, see where she is . My sister went up to the roof and kept calling me while I was on the other side, playing house with my friends on the grass. Because I was young... And today's generations of ten-year-olds and nine-year-olds are more aware than we were. As for us, we were under God's will. We did not know how, nor did we want to know.

Hajjeh, how long did you stay in ʿAmqa before the skirmishes started with the Jews?

I was there for three years... Three or four years. I know that when I left Palestine, I was eighteen years old. I got married at the age of fourteen.

What happened before you left? What was the thing that made you leave your house?

The war that was brought upon us, dear. The tanks came for us, and because we fought against them, we had nothing left [to fight with] when they invaded the town. They started bombing the town, they burnt down the houses, they bombed, and after they bombed the whole village that had resisted against them, they brought bulldozers and bulldozed the entire town.

Where were you when they brought the bulldozers?

We were in the Druze regions, in Jat and Yanuḥ and Yarka, these were Druze towns. The Druze were peaceful, they did not fight. We sought refuge in their towns. When we heard that the borders would close down, we left the Druze regions and went to the borders.

Did the men come with you?

No, the men had crossed and fled before the borders had closed. They had run away, they had no more ammunition left. I had two daughters, my husband could not even take one of them. He left me and he went. When we got to the borders, they (the Druze) told us, These are the borders with Lebanon, you can go through. These are the borders with Palestine, and we will be coming back . We went from the Lebanese borders... First, they dropped us off on

the street, at the border. When my daughter saw the armed Jew, she got scared and started crying. If you could see how beautiful she was... How beautiful my daughters are. Even though I'm not pretty, their father is handsome. The girl started crying, so the Jew told me: Madam . That street was at the Palestine-Lebanon border. I said, Yes? and went like this and stayed there (lowers her head pulls her headscarf to hide her face). He said, Silence bubu, why is he crying, this bubu, why does he cry? . I told him, *Khawaja*, he want water to drink . He went like this on his water bottle (gestures tapping on the right hip) and said, No water... You be waiting here, me go get water? I looked this way over to the Lebanese borders and saw people on camels and donkeys stocking up on water. So I told him: Khawaja, if you do favour to God, not to me, to God and to bubu, you allow I go. I go down there, there is water, and I make bubu drink . What did he answer? He said this and that, Ukhtu (Mother——) Arab. Ukhtu Arab, Ukhtu Arab. All Arab not good . The Druze that had brought us there had also loaded a few things on a camel. A bit of semolina and a bit of wheat, and two blankets and a mattress, on one camel, and they brought us over, the two Druze. They [the armed Jews] had surrounded the camel and they were searching it. I had seventy Palestinian Liras and a couple of spiral bracelets. I had slid them inside my girl's pillow, it was this size, and then under the laundry basin, and had her sitting on it. They came and said, Take girl off . I removed her, and they tore out the seams of the pillow. They wanted to see what was in it, but they still hadn't broken the inside. When the Jew—whom I had asked to let me get water as a favour to God - came back, he told me, All gold you carry, you leave here so bubu can go. Yalla, leave it and you go for bubu. Leave all of gold, and you can go . I told him: God bless you, *Khawaja*. May God protect you, *Khawaja* . They put the things on the camel, and we left. They did not take one piaster from us. They did not humiliate us, nor did they beat us, nothing at all. That was at the border. We went down to ʿAyta ash-Shab. In ʿAyta, we were boiling to death, out of fear and out of thirst. We went to sit down, they had made a cabin and were guarding the fig tree so that nobody would pick it. We went into the cabin and found it full of fleas. We left it and sat outside, with the girls under the sun. One of them was crying of thirst, and I was thirsty as well (wipes tears). We looked over and found a well, there was a dead goat beside it. I swear, the worms inside it were moving like boiling rice. We opened the well and found a puddle of water at the bottom. We wanted to drink, but we could not reach the depths of the well. My cousin and I took off our scarves and tied them together with my girl's blanket, and we dipped them into the puddle at the bottom, and then we wrung them in a plate, like this (wrings fabric). The water came out... You know how the water gets when it rains, the dirt, the redness... I swear to God, we drank it. But what about the girls? I went into a nearby house and I told him... I went in... I knocked on the door, he said, What's wrong with you, who are you, lady? I told him, I am Palestinian. God bless you, brother, may God extend your life, what is your name? He said: My name is Bou Kamel . I said: May God protect your children, Bou Kamel, would you please give me just a bit of water in a jug so these poor girls can drink? They are thirsty and little and they are dying in front of me . He told me: Shoo shoo, go out, leave, leave, leave . I told him: Why, my brother, what did I do to you? He said, You Palestinians, we don't welcome you. We don't welcome you, you are unclean . I said: No, my brother, I swear we didn't do anything. Maybe you could give me a bit of water as a favour towards God . He told me, I won't give you . I said, If I gave you a jug of oil, would you give me a jug of water? He said: Do you swear that nobody else touched the olives? I told him: I swear, I was the one who picked it and pressed it into the gallon and who brought it with me . So, I gave him a jug

of olive oil, and I swear he gave me a jug of water. And we stayed thirteen days in ʿAyta ash-Shab, and then we went to Jwaya and then from there to Hayy al-Maslakh. I swear, we kept in touch and asked about him and he came to visit us from ʿAyta ash-Shab to Hayy al-Maslakh, and we went to visit him as well. We became friends. He gave me a jug of water, I gave him a jug of olive oil. We suffered a lot, my dear.
We arrived to Jwaya, the weather change bothered them [the children]. My older daughter's head started swelling, she was three years old. Her head, her hands and her feet became swollen, and she died and I had no money to treat her. And the other girl got [an unknown disease] in her mouth and she died. We arrived to Hayy al-Maslakh, and I gave birth to my kids here in Hayy al-Maslakh. My oldest son was born in 1950. I left in 1948. I raised them into young men, and they are now married. The ones I lost, I did not find again. They left in an instant while I was with them. And here I am, twenty-three years later and still searching (she means 32 years later). Still crying and still searching. After everything that happened to me, it's good that I can still stand up, it's good that I can still see, it's good that I still have my brain and I can still come and go.

Why did you not stay with them? When you told me...

I am married, dear.

Didn't you say your husband departed and left you?

I am married, I am from the village of Danun and I married in ʿAmqa. When the war started, and the tank was bombing us with missiles, he ran, I never saw him leave. His mother was running in front of him, he took her and his siblings, and he came to Lebanon, and I was still inside Palestine.

Do you express your longing towards Palestine, or to the town of Shaykh Danun where your children live... or where your siblings live? I mean, despite the catastrophe of your children whose fate you do not know about...

In the same way that the memory of my children remained... Although the memory of my country does not equal the memory I carry of my children, I will never forget my country. I will never forget my nation. I will never forget my hometown. And I don't wish to be buried anywhere other than in my country, over there, because that is where my brother, my mother, my father and my sister are, and I would be with them. If I told you that my country could compare to my children, I would be lying. A child is more precious than one s own soul. A mother is not more important than her child. As they say, I'd rather wish for death to have me and to spare my child . As for my country, I could never forget it, and it remains in my thoughts, but not as much as my children. Even my husband who was martyred... Not as much as my children. Not even my sister, not as much as my children. Nor my brother, not as much as my children. My older brother who died, not as much as my children (begins to cry). And my sister died, and they all died, but none of them compare to my children. My children were born from my heart.