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**Most Difficult Times: A Palestinian in Refuge**

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Dear Peter,

Over the past half century, many Palestinians have become refugees in various parts of the world, particularly in the Arab world, but also within their own homeland. Their lives mark a bitter testimony to human suffering and political neglect.

The following narrative depicts the "most difficult times" of a Palestinian life--a life filled with disappointments and dangers, and lacking moments of joy.

HHA: Can you introduce yourself please?

JIF: I am Jamal Ibrahim Farraj. I was born in Deheisheh camp in 1964. Currently, I reside in both Amman and Syria. My current place of residence is not fully settled, so I commute between Amman and Syria. I am married and have two children. I work in for the Palestinian resistance media, specifically for Al-Hadaf Magazine.

HHA: It is obvious that you have resided in several places since 1964. In 1989, you lived in Deheisheh camp, but then you were deported. Could you tell us memories of the camp before we get to the deportation story? What did you experience in the camp?

JIF: My time in the camp was quite eventful, and my memories quite full of excitement. During the last six years, I have often remembered my time in the camp. To be more specific, I consider the years of diaspora to have been spent in vain. I feel that the most productive time of my life was in the camp, in spite of my young age at the time. If I were to evaluate my life and the degree of its productivity, I would find that recent years have not been more than average.

The camp has tremendous meaning for us. The poverty in the camp has meaning. The people of the camp have meaning. So do the values and the misery of the camp. These memories are difficult and

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pleasant at the same time. As long as we are talking about me, I would like to start with the period of which I am most proud, namely the year 1980. I consider myself to have been born in that year or toward the end of 1979.

During that time, I was no more than 16 years of age. I joined the Palestinian resistance then. A qualitative change in my life took place when I was arrested by the occupation authorities. I was not practically involved in the resistance movement, nor did I perform any resistance activities against the occupation. I was arrested for the mere fact that my name was Jamal Farraj, and my family had a history of arrests. My older brothers had been arrested previously.

The arrest woke me up to an important matter. It alerted me to the reality of the existence of the occupation within myself. I was arrested for forty days in 1979. I remember how young I was, and my maturity was not fully evolved. I was put in an atmosphere which was much tougher than my age and/or my level of maturity. I was taken to an interrogation center in Jerusalem, called Al-Maskubiyyeh. For health related reasons (I suffer from diabetes), I was moved to the Al-Ramleh hospital/prison. Al-Ramleh hospital is known for containing Israeli criminal prisoners, such as drug addicts and those with psychological deformities, as well as Palestinian political prisoners. I found myself confronting a tough state of affairs. I was put in a room with six or seven Israeli drug addicts, who come from the bottom of Israeli society. A challenge faced me. I lived a state of great fear, but I managed to get out of it, probably stronger than before.

As a result of the arrest, which was conducted for no reason, I joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. I was assigned the rather difficult task of throwing molotovs. As a result, I was arrested for one-and-a-half years.

The dangerous part of such an experience is the interrogation phase. That is where I faced the challenge being a Palestinian deserving of the title "freedom fighter." The most important pressure exerted on me was the deprivation of my daily insulin dosage. During the first fifteen days of a forty day interrogation, the interrogator bargained with me over my insulin to the extent that my blood sugar level reached 800. Then the Israeli prison nurse came to visit me and told the interrogator in charge that he could not be responsible for my health. I left the interrogation after forty days. I was sentenced due to one of my colleague's confessions.

Prison was an important school for me. It had many positive influences on me personally. I don't want to talk about my national existence, but the growth of my personality and character. In addition to the enhancement of my national identity, an important change took place in the formation of my character. For example, I used to consider holding a cigarette in front of my father or my older brother a big achievement. The prison enabled me to develop my own indepen-

dent, strong being.

The experience of the prison was an important one in spite of all the suffering we encountered as prisoners. One usually leaves the prison, even after a short duration of one or one-and-a-half years, with quite a strong personality, in addition to the pride felt in one's national belonging. I left prison after one-and-a-half years with a rich experience, a more profound thought process, a more mature and developed struggle tactic, and more enhanced means to confront the challenges of life.

I started working at grassroots Palestinian institutions that were formed in the 1980's. I also worked in journalism until the intifada started. Between 1979 and 1987, I was arrested more than seventeen times. Some were administrative detentions<sup>1</sup>, and others were for interrogation.

The most important phase in my life, as well as in our Palestinian people's life in my view, was the outbreak of the intifada. I say this in spite of the bleakness people feel today regarding the outcome of the intifada. The intifada gave every Palestinian person an opportunity to deepen his or her feeling of national belonging and to act out the internal desire to take revenge on the occupation. I remember that in the first few months of the intifada, we were not able to call it an intifada. I vividly remember these first days. I was one of the people in charge of Palestinian institutions in the Bethlehem area. The intifada was sparked in Gaza. Then it took off in Nablus, specifically in the Balata camp. After a few days, it spread very quickly to various areas in the occupied territories. I don't want to narrate what happened during the intifada. What I want to account for, however, is how we as Palestinians, or as freedom fighters, viewed the intifada.

We used to repeat these words: "Oh God, may it go on for another week. Only one more week." Those who belonged to certain organizations and those who did not called for the intensifying of all efforts to ensure the intifada's continuity. We used to pray to God daily. At the end of each day, we prayed, "Only one more week." After the passage of the first week, we prayed to God to keep it going for one more month so that, as the colloquial expression goes, "I will take it out against this thing called occupation." This was an opportunity for me to take out all the hatred and express all repressed feelings caused by long years of oppression. The intifada started, and many efforts were directed in its service. It grew bigger and became more interactive to the extent that no one underestimated his or her ability to

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<sup>1</sup>Under the terms of administrative detention, as set by Israeli authorities, a Palestinian prisoner can be held incommunicado without a specific charge or trial for an average of six months.

participate. In return, the occupation authorities were quite confused because the intifada was so great and all-encompassing and with all the ingredients required for the struggle. The intelligence apparatus of the state did not perceive or predict that an intifada was coming. If you think about it, you will find that in the first and second year of the intifada, the laborer left his job not because the Israelis prevented him from getting to the factory, but to show solidarity with the intifada. The student left school so that all energies would be directed toward supporting the intifada.

I was one of those people. I may have differed a little bit, however, because I was close to the situation and thus well informed of it. I had a specific task to perform by virtue of belonging to an organization. I was a member of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising in the Bethlehem area. The various factions delegated to us the responsibility of distributing intifada leaflets. This was one of the responsibilities delegated to me. We had contacts and places to work all over the Bethlehem area--villages and refugee camps.

The eighth leaflet of the intifada represented an important phase in my personal history. I was arrested while I was distributing it to some youth in charge of specific locations. I was supposed to take some leaflets to Battir and Hussan villages. With me was one of my friends, my comrades, a young woman of whom I am so proud. From her I learned sumud' (steadfastness). Every time some despair or weakness tried to permeate me, I would hear her crying out, "No!" in the interrogation chambers. This young woman formed an important backbone of my well-being and sumud' in the interrogation chambers. She lived a life of clear challenge to the occupation authorities. An intelligence officer found in her pocket a report about the work of Palestinian women in the Bethlehem area. When he asked her about it, she simply said, "You put it in my pocket." In the cells of Al-Masskubiyeh prison, she used to go where young men were being held. If she found someone who had made a confession, she would rebuke him very strongly; she would tell him, "Damn the moustache you're wearing on your face." After forty days of interrogation, one intelligence officer told her, "I have brought you a gift from your superior, the secretary-general [of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, PFLP, Dr. George Habash]." She asked, "What is it?" He replied, "Administrative detention, six months." She answered, "Are you sure that it is from our boss?" He said, "Yes." She concluded, "Would you mind asking him for six more months?"

It is quite difficult to talk about oneself. I feel rather bottled up. Allow me to digress to talk about the experiences other people have had. This young woman is still struggling in spite of the today's bleak circumstances. Once the intelligence officer told her, "I want to destroy you. Now I'm gonna bring someone to rape you." She responded, "There is no need to rape." She started unbuttoning her shirt and told the officer, "If you're a man, you do the rape yourself. You don't quite understand. You believe that my honor means my body. My honor is Palestine and all the values it signifies."

We spent forty days in interrogation, but there was no confession. As I told you before, one of the reasons for my sumud was that young woman.

It should be known that the intelligence apparatus built a lot of hopes on arresting us, the group to whom I belonged. Let's discuss February 18, 1988, roughly two-and-a-half months after the outbreak of the intifada. The intelligence community was very confused; they didn't know what was going on. Our arrest was so important to them. Eight or nine hours after we were held, they announced that they had caught what might be considered "strings" to the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising. Yitzhak Rabin himself, who was the defense minister at the time, made the announcement. You can imagine how sure the intelligence apparatus felt that they would be able to derive the type of information they needed about the intifada.

They couldn't, thank goodness. I have said it several times--one of the reasons for my sumud was that young woman who was an inspiration to me in my dealing with the intelligence apparatus.

From interrogation, we were assigned administrative detention status. I was transferred to Negev. A new prison was being opened there, and I was in the first group to have been sent to that prison. If we were to talk just about the Negev prison, many hours of discussion wouldn't be enough. To get to that prison, you have to travel seven to ten hours by car in the Negev Desert. It has a characteristic look to it. I was not born around the time of the Nazis, but from what I have read, it is quite similar to Nazi-like concentration camps. It is surrounded by heavy-duty tanks and artillery directed at the prisoners' tents. In the Negev, the heat of the sun rises to 40-45 degrees centigrade during the day. At night, the temperature drops to several degrees below zero. There is real starvation! You feel hungry day and night on a daily basis. They used to give us some food, but it wasn't sufficient. It wasn't enough at all.

The eyes of so many prisoners do not stare except at the open sky. There is nothing else in front of them but the sky. I witnessed more than one incident of murder in cold blood in the prison. Once a prisoner refused to stand in the sun for six or seven hours so that the guards could carry out a headcount. They used to do a headcount three times a day. Can you imagine counting five thousand prisoners? The five-thousand had to stand at 8 a.m. Only when the headcount of all five-thousand was finished could the prisoners go back into their tents.

In spite of that, the eyes of the prisoners used to glimmer with sumud. One time Rabin came, ostensibly to visit the prison. One of the guys who prepared the prisoners' food had a beard. When Rabin went to the cafeteria, he asked, "Are you Hamas?" The young man answered, "No. I'm Palestinian." Rabin asked further, "How do you like the prison?" The guy responded, "It's rather good that you came, so that I can see you. I want to thank you so, so much for bringing me to the

Negev. You know that I never knew the Negev. I never liked the Negev. But now that I've come to this prison, I was received with an embrace from the Negev. My love of the Negev has increased. Even if I were to become weak at some stage, I would never forfeit my right to the Negev now, as I might have done before."

These are scenes that compel one to pause and think of what is happening now. As a people we have a tremendous will to sacrifice. We are persuaded that we have rights; thus, things should not look as gloomy as some people see them.

I left the Negev as a result of a trick. My health deteriorated somewhat. A Druse nurse came to see me four months after I was taken to Negev. I was supposed to stay there for six months. He asked me why I was put in prison. I told him that they charged me with stone-throwing. "Just stone-throwing?" he asked. "Yes indeed," I replied. During that time, my file with my i.d. card and the charge sheet was lost due to the transfer between Al-Maskubiyyeh and the Negev. This represented a good opportunity for me. The nurse said, "If you are here just because of stone-throwing, I am going to send you home today." "You cannot do that," I remarked. "Of course I can," he said. It was a challenge. "All you are required to do is to say thank you to the physician," he said further.

Indeed, the following day the prison authorities called me up. They released me by mistake. One day after my release, however, intelligence officers came to our house to correct the error they had made.

My bad luck was that I couldn't stay around for long during the intifada. In August 1988, I was arrested for deportation. This was a most difficult, bitter experience. Its bitterness lay in the way the arrest was carried out. It uprooted a person who had always hoped to leave the borders of Palestine, see the world and return home. I was hoping to travel for a few weeks to visit Jordan and Syria. This was my wish; however, I was not allowed to travel. The difficulty of the deportation was exacerbated by the way the arrest was carried out. It was exactly like uprooting a tree from the ground only to throw it in an area that has neither water, nor even soil.

During that time, I was pursued. They exploited the fact that one of my brothers, who had cancer, was in London for treatment. My brother disclosed the fact of his illness only to me because the special relationship he and I had. Even his wife and our mother were not told about it. He told them that he was to travel only for some check-ups. I was the one concerned about him most. I had no news of him for two months. Phone lines between the occupied territories and the rest of the world were put out of order by the Israeli authorities during the intifada.

One day, someone working at one of the camp's gas stations came and told me that my brother had called and said that he would call

again at 12:00 noon to talk to me. I couldn't believe what I heard. I could hardly wait. I was there on time. As soon as I arrived, about fourteen men wearing civilian uniform surrounded me and knocked me to the ground. When I first saw them, I thought they were settlers. These were the most difficult moments in my life. For the first time I discovered how precious life is. I thought that they were settlers. I started getting weaker and weaker, but I tried to regain some strength. They beat me for about five minutes. People started crowding around. They felt that the crowd might interfere to release me from them. They lifted me up and threw me in a Pijo Tender Car. The car had a Hebron liscence plate, which indicates that they stole it from one of Hebron's residents. During this whole period, I didn't see any of their faces. My one and only concern was to protect my head from the hits of gun butts. The road was very long, despite the fact that the distance from Deheisheh to the Bethlehem military center, where they took me, does not exceed 3km. The only thing I was thinking was that these were settlers. I convinced myself that I was to die. I read Al-Fatha, (a Sura from the Qur'an, usually read at such a time). I further told myself, "Get some courage. The martyr, Ibrahim Al-Ra'i is not stronger than you." I started encouraging myself so that I wouldn't weaken. I saw death with my own eyes. I started talking to myself: "Send my greetings to my family, to my mother and to my wife." My son wasn't born yet; he was in his mother's womb. "I wish I had seen the baby before I died," I started saying to myself.

Those were most difficult moments. Shortly thereafter, the car was brought to a halt. I could tell that they got out because their shoes were removed from my back. About 24 feet were on my body. I knew that the moment of truth had arrived. Not too long afterwards, they removed the dirty old sack, which they had used as a blindfold. An intelligence officer named Karim was waiting for me. At that moment, I exploded. I was quite happy that I was in the hands of the intelligence officer rather than the settlers. I started shouting at them: "You sons of bitches; you assholes; you fascists!" The intelligence officer was aware of my state of mind. He prepared a pack of cigarettes for me, the type I smoke, Imperial. "You are right," he said. "Take this and smoke a couple of cigarettes. I will come back."

Half an hour later, Karim returned. "I know that you are going through a very difficult time. You have been getting arrested from the time you were a child. I promise you that this will be the last time you are arrested," he said. "In God's name," I said, "Are you going to leave the country?" "No! We are not leaving the country," he answered. "Therefore, it cannot be the last time because I will continue to struggle," I replied. He responded, "We have made the decision to deport you."

I don't know if I can describe my state of mind. I felt that the intifada would end, as if I were responsible for the intifada. This was my feeling. "Oh! How will the intifada go on," I questioned myself. Can you imagine the state of mind I was in? I don't know what to call it. It was a most difficult phase. When they executed the deportation

decision seven months later, my only concern was to convey to everyone to take care of the intifada. The intifada gave our people the chance to release all that was inside us against the occupation.

The moments of the deportation decision were the most difficult in my life. I felt that I was leaving something important behind me. I lost the chance of participating in the making of the intifada in a more effective way and for a longer duration.

However, if you were to ask me today, I will tell you that my emotions are decreasing and my evaluation is changing. When one is in the heart of the intifada, he tends to be ambitious. To be killed and/or to be arrested for a long time is not a problem. This is a response to many of the questions I keep hearing. The question often is raised: Why would a young man wrap himself with a belt of explosives to go on a suicide mission? For me, there is an easy answer to such a question. Some people have true faith in a better life--one that comes after life on this earth. This is how many people feel, and it explains why people go on suicide missions.

I was taken to Al-Jinaid prison. It was a long difficult period. We were 24 freedom fighters against whom deportation decisions were taken. I was the last to be arrested. Twenty-three other prisoners were at Al-Jinaid prison when I got there. They all said to me: "Where have you been. We have been waiting for you." They couldn't announce the deportation decision until after my arrest. Throughout the whole period before my arrest I was being pursued.

Then I was deported. The same night the deportation was executed, January 1, 1989, Karim arrived from Bethlehem to Nablus where we were held. At around 11:00 p.m., they opened the door and called me. Karim was there to say goodbye to me.

I remember Karim quite well. He was awful and terrible. However, I learned several important things from Karim. I vividly remember the type of discussion we had. He would say: "You are still a young man. You have had so many problems from the time you were 14. You have been arrested many times. I came here to convey my concern for you. I want you to go out so that you can see what the real world looks like." I said to him: "The question is resolved. The deportation decision will not break my spirit." He talked in length about the Al-Hamra nights that the leaders of our people enjoy.<sup>2</sup> He said, "You will have a chance, once you leave, to see how things are run. You will see how people live." I understood exactly what he meant. I vividly remember those words. I remember them more when we see our sacrificial people in the current awful state of affairs.

By the way, Karim came to the Bethlehem area to assume responsi-

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<sup>2</sup>Al-Hamra is one of Beirut's most famous streets for night-life.



bility for Deheisheh camp in 1979. Also in 1979, I started getting involved in political life. Over the years his responsibilities as an intelligence officer expanded. Meanwhile I matured under his eyes. In a way, we grew up together in Bethlehem. Karim carried out all of my arrests. This growing up together may have created something in Karim's personality towards me, as much as it has created something in my personality towards him. Everyone knew that whoever appeared before Karim would be subjected to violence, rebuke and spitting. But at no point did Karim ever touch, rebuke or curse me. Once when he came to arrest me, my elderly mother said to him, "You have been giving this kid a hard time." He replied, "No one has given me a harder time than your son."

A human being is made up of feelings and emotions. His visit to me just before the deportation was executed might have evolved from this human make-up. What is important to keep in mind is that I still vividly remember the last words he said to me.

If you want me to evaluate the sequence of my life, I would say to you that the first day after the deportation represents a real murder for me. The first day of the deportation represents the beginning of the suffering that I still experience. Here I am: a man, faithful to his just cause, yet uprooted and thrown into the vast land.

We left for Beirut through South Lebanon. The journey was harsh. The helicopters took off from Huwwara center in Nablus and transported us to an area in South Lebanon. The planes landed shortly after their take-off. We were transported from the helicopter to a military vehicle that was under the control of the Israeli army. Not too long afterwards some Lahd soldiers accompanied us.<sup>3</sup> I remember that there was a tent in Marj Al-Zuhur with a physician and an officer inside.<sup>4</sup> They let us in one by one. The physician asked us if we complained of any pain, and the officer offered to give each of the deportees \$50 to use until reaching our destination. All the deportees unequivocally said: "Go and buy bullets with this money so that you can oppress our people more." Lahd's army got control of us in Marj Al-Zuhur. We then traveled by car for a short while. We were first handed over to the Red Cross and then to the Syrian intelligence apparatus in the area.

Psychologically, we were all feeling very bad. However, the warmth with which our people in Lebanon received us impacted us in an immeasurable way. To them, we were freedom fighters coming from the

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<sup>3</sup>Lahd is the head of the South Lebanon Army, which is backed by Israel.

<sup>4</sup>Marj Al-Zuhur is the area to which several hundred Islamicists were deported.

heart of the intifada. In their deeply rooted conviction, the intifada was the type of event needed to take them back to Palestine. It was an incredible feeling. I cannot describe our reception to you. The people were quite thirsty to hear about what was going on.

In Lebanon the situation was tragic. There was real starvation. When one talks about Lebanon, one immediately remember the Syrian oppression and the Lebanese government's oppression of the Palestinian masses. A Palestinian could not get a job even if he were to work in sanitation. Children were roaming the streets because the schools were not open. Even when the schools were open, the child's mind was continuously preoccupied with his ears stretched upwards towards the sky: "Are planes coming to bomb these schools?"

Two scenes related to the suffering in Lebanon continue to stick to my mind. The first is concerned with the Tarablus area in the north; it was surrounded by the Syrian army. They were looking for Abu-Ammar and his men. People could not leave the camps of the area, namely Al-Baddawi and Al-Bared, nor could anybody enter these camps. It was so bad that we managed to visit only undercover. We, the deportees, were the first to visit the camps. Health clinics were closed because they had no medicine. I could not help but notice the women and children who were searching in garbage containers for a rotten leaf of lettuce.

In spite of it all, I saw real resilience and challenge. The challenge wasn't directed at the Israeli occupation, but rather at the Syrian army. An old man, who was about 85, said to me: "Abu Ammar stopped sending us money; Abu Ammar is not sending us medicine. Nevertheless, we love him." The old man then said, "Let me show you." He pulled me to one of the rooms in his house where I saw a Matwa, an old-fashioned closet which stores mattresses and linens. He took out all the mattresses and blankets until he got to the bottom. Stored safely there was an old, rusty picture of Abu Ammar--an expression of challenge.

The other scene comes from the refugee camps of the South, Al-Burj, for example. The refugee camps in the South are bombed daily or weekly by Israeli warplanes. From a distance, you can watch the exploding boxes of tin. The walls and roofs are made of tin and/or asbestos. There is nothing in these camps but tin--no stones or concrete cement. One builds walls of tin only to have them destroyed a week later by warplanes. One saves \$50-60 to buy a piece of tin only to lose it sooner than one imagines.

In spite of it all, you will see people staring in the direction of metulla every morning, the direction of their homeland Palestine. We spent 40 days there, and we witnessed starvation.

Following that, we left for Algeria. As is the case in most other countries, there are a lot of hotels. We stayed in a rather

modest one for the first two days there. On the third day, one of the [PLO] officials ordered us to go another hotel, the Urasî.

Keep in mind that when we were in Lebanon, our morale got higher. Our people were confronting life in spite of starvation. The Urasî hotel is one of the largest hotels in Algiers. Remember that we are still talking about the post-deportation period. We were each given a pen to sign the bill, and we could order anything we wanted. We spent hundreds of Algerian pounds on a daily basis. After the first three days, another one of the deportees, (I remember his name, Uthman Daud from Qalqilya) and I went to talk to the Palestinian ambassador in Algiers. We said to him, "We are uncomfortable in this hotel. We would like to go back to the one we were in before. The sums of money spent on our behalf in the hotel do not belong to us." The response he gave was so harsh that we started shouting at each other: "Heavens! Spend as much as want! Many others do! You are not about to practice religion in Malta!"

In Tunis, the situation was more difficult and dangerous. I can sum it up with one little story. A Palestinian wanted to rent some premises from a Tunisian, who told him simply that he wouldn't rent him his house because he was Palestinian. "Why wouldn't you do that?" the Palestinian asked. "Frankly," the Tunisian responded, "underneath me, where another Palestinian was renting, the quality and amount of food thrown to the dog made my son so curious and anxious every day. He would stand at the top of the stairway next to the railing every morning and just stare. What extravagance!"

The situation was both difficult and dangerous for us. We spent six to seven months, travelling between Algeria and Tunis, searching for a mission to perform and even requesting a mission to perform. We were looking for any mission. We had just arrived from a major battleground. We were cadres and intifada Generals, but we could find no mission nor any outlet for ourselves in Palestinian institutions. The Israeli press went as far as to suggest that we, those deportees, posed a threat to such institutions and to PLO offices. Afterwards, I went to Syria, hoping to find a resistance-related job. I already had a plan in mind. I couldn't a job.

I told you that I had a lot to say. I belong to an opposition faction. Later on, I discovered that none of the Palestinian factions that exist outside the occupied territories are capable of implementing any resistance program consistent with the requirements of this phase. The intifada was a unique opportunity that never will come again. Its name is intifada-- a people's movement of old and young men, women, students, workers and children. It was a unique opportunity for us to pursue a new goal. Palestinian factions did not reap the fruits of this opportunity. Actually, on the contrary! Shortly after the intifada started, the enemy of the intifada was no longer only the Israeli occupation and some Arab regimes. The intifada started to confront the conniving Palestinian factions and their attempts to contain it. Palestinian factions attempted to

freeze and/or weaken the organization within the occupied territories so that insiders would not assume control. The intifada shifted the focus of actual resistance from outside the occupied territories to inside. This was interpreted as a challenge to the domination of the resistance by the outside. As such, faction leaders on the outside started to fight this trend of the intifada youth. Because of this, two years after it started, the intifada began to wane. New tactics were proposed: "We want a peaceful intifada, a nonviolent intifada." Or: "Fearing the occupation authorities might commit massacres against our people, we should not launch any military attacks."

I talked with one of the progressive Israeli Jews who came to Syria. Present at the discussion was a top PFLP official, the Secretary-General himself. The progressive Jew said: "The intifada is good. It is a popular expression of resistance to the occupation. However, it will not bring about your state." "What is required?" we asked. He said, "Send the occupiers five or six bodies every day. You will see the results two or three years later." This discussion took place one-and-a-half years after the start of the intifada.

I have found it difficult to talk about my personal experience, but what I have been talking about is personal in nature. As a cadre or a soldier of the intifada, I understand what I am talking about. Indeed, it was incumbent upon us to send the occupiers six bodies every day so that we would see the results. Precisely! This is what happened in Gaza. Rabin said, "I wish to wake up one morning and find that the sea has swallowed it." Why? Because there was blood.

Occupation is occupation. The fact that it is occupation means that we should not resist it with flowers. We should resist it in a manner consistent with occupation. Please, don't consider me unrealistic for saying that. I am a realistic person; I exactly understand what the equation looks like. I am not suggesting that we throw the Jews in the sea. I don't even say anymore that Palestine is from the river to the sea. This might be my conviction, but translating it into a reality is another thing.

I didn't express support or opposition to the Madrid talks; however, I understood the equation exactly. Even when I mentioned the discussion with this progressive Jew, I knew that he meant the West Bank and Gaza Strip, not the 1948 territories. I agreed.

The first fact I discovered during the years of being uprooted from Palestine is the conflict between the people living inside the occupied territories and the leaders on the outside. I do not exclude any of the factions. At a time when the intifada should have cost the occupation some human casualties, we stopped funneling in financial support to back it up. This was done after so much money was given at the beginning of the intifada to Fatah's Hawks, the Red Eagle and the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam battalions, which incidentally belonged at first to the Democratic Front. When it was decided that

the intifada should be peaceful, we ordered that all actions should be stopped. That was not all. People who were pursued by the Israelis and sentenced to life in prison could not find a bite of food to eat or a house to rent. Several of those who were pursued found themselves compelled to sell their weapons in order to secure basic needs, e.g. a place to sleep.

I discovered this fact rather quickly. As a result, I started looking around for a job in the midst of this complicated situation. In addition to keeping up with developments in the Occupied Territories, I worked in Al-Hadaf. When the ten opposition factions' group was formed, I attended their meetings. I have a lot of reservations about the people who signed the Oslo Accord. However, I continued to participate in the Popular Front. The reasons for such reservations are well-known. From an ideological standpoint, these [signatories] are the bourgeoisie. They do not have the stamina to keep up with the historical responsibility entrusted to them.

My reservations concerning the opposition factions are sharper, harsher and more angry. Being in the center of the decision-making in Syria enabled me to see how these people think. They don't even visit their martyrs. They visit them only on the day of the Eid. The way a visit is conducted makes you want to cry. The leader arrives in a brand new car with four cars guarding from the front and four others from the back. He gets there, circles around the cemetery and just leaves. They only go to the grave of the martyr Abu-Jihad, whom I respect. They set down some flowers and leave. The mother, weeping and mourning the death of her son in the next grave, does not even receive a greeting.

Abu-Jihad is the prince of martyrs. There should be first-class martyrs and average martyrs. A person angry with the resistance movement once told me that he wanted to show me something. He took me to a newly-built martyrs' cemetery near Al-Yarmuk camp. It was nicely laid out. He asked me, "What is it that captures your attention in this cemetery?" I replied, "It is this distinct grave here, which is bigger than the rest and, unlike the rest, is surrounded by huge trees." I inquired as to whose grave it was. I was told and then made to read the sign. It was the grave of a martyr, Abu-Moussa's son, but Abu-Moussa's son died a natural death. In spite of that, his grave was noted as one of a martyr's.

For a variety of reasons, our people living on the outside can be classified in three categories based on their geographic locations: those living in Jordan, in Syria and in Lebanon. Due to the different political environments of each of these three countries, each segment of our people has developed its own political and behavioral characteristics. This is quite natural. When we speak of our people in Jordan, we think of relative stability for the past 20-30 years. Life has been running somewhat smoothly. By and large, people living there can think and dream of a house and a job--some sense of relative stability. In Syria, on the other hand, the psyche

of Palestinians has been tremendously affected by the fact that many national factions are based there. In Lebanon, however, the challenges are bigger due to the nature of the Lebanese government and the country's sectarian system. Some political and religious sects have resisted the Palestinian and made him live in a state of permanent threat. I remember that twenty days after I arrived in Lebanon, the Amal movement announced that it would lift the siege from the Palestinian camps in Soor as a gift to the intifada. It was suggested that we as deportees should start the new relationship. This, too, was a most difficult experience. We went to the camps in a caravan of about ten cars. We had to cross more than one check-point manned by Amal. By coincidence, I was in the last car of the delegation. We were accompanied by a member of Amal's political department. When we got to the check-point, it had already been closed. We had to stay outside the area where we wanted to go. The top officer at the check-point asked, "Where are you from?" "We are Palestinian deportees who came as a part of the delegation," we said. "Palestinians? You sons of the bitches! Get out!" he ordered. Our companion, who was also Palestinian, explained that we were deportees. "These are coming as traitors, as spies," the officer insisted. He dragged three of us--another deportee, the companion and myself--to an area behind the check-point. He was ready to shoot us. Once again, we saw death before our eyes. There was so much anger in him, real anger. Our lives were saved just at the moment he was getting ready to kill us. Another member from the political department, who had been sent by the delegation to look after us, arrived at the scene. His arrival rescued us.

Let's go back to what's happening in Syria. In Syria, our Palestinian people, as well as the Syrian people, have made a lot of sacrifices. I might say with certainty that every Palestinian home has lost at least one martyr. In spite of all the circumstances I have discussed, however, you are likely to find that Palestinians tend to act unconcerned with the political developments taking place today. A Palestinian living in Syria, Lebanon or Jordan feels that he is the only loser given as a result of what is unfolding now. For example, as a citizen living in the Bethlehem area, I feel that I might go back to Bethlehem. A Palestinian citizen who was born in Haifa, but currently living in Syria, will lose everything, however, due to the dictates of the political [peace] process. Because of this, Palestinians living in Syria act unconcerned.

A couple of days after Oslo, I went to buy a pack of cigarettes from an old Palestinian man who has lost four martyrs and has only one remaining son. "What do you think of the signing of the accord?" I asked. "Thank goodness!" he responded. "How come? You won't be able to go back to your hometown, nor will you get any compensation!" I exclaimed. "At least, now you won't fool my fifth son and take him to die. I insured that my fifth son will not die the way his brothers did," he answered. Here is an old man who has sacrificed four martyrs. He reached this conclusion. In his words, there is a lesson to be learned. What is it that made this old man reach this

conclusion? In my view, it is not just the signing of the Oslo accord. Rather, it is the behavior of the Palestinian national factions in Syria towards our people there. I know that from experience. I used to work in one of the offices, and next to us was a Democratic Front office. (Note that I don't exclude anyone including the Popular Front of which I am still a member.) I heard screaming voices. A Palestinian family called the Syrian police to complain about the noise level continuously created by the office. This might sound like a normal story. To me, however, that an office created to serve the resistance would cause noise and lead a Palestinian family to ask for its eviction bespeaks of some reality. This is as far as behavior is concerned.

As to the overall political attitude, "the letter can be read from its address," as they say. In the ten factions' meeting I attended, we wasted an hour or ninety minutes discussing who would chair the session--Nayef Hawatmeh or Abu-Ali Mustafa.<sup>5</sup> This is a travesty. This is what the ten factions do: waste time over who should chair a session. Forget about the important dangerous mission they are supposed to perform, namely, confronting the political process that could destroy our people.

In Syria, our national work has to get the approval of the Syrian government. When you call for a march, you have to obtain a Syrian permit. This leads me to say that our enemy is not just the Israeli occupation. On a personal level, I have not been confronted by any Israeli during the past five years of my life. The suffering and pain I have felt during the past five years has not been caused by the occupation. However, I have suffered from the Arab regimes, whether in Syria, Lebanon or Jordan. During this phase I have been moving around with a false passport. As a Palestinian, I have a clear nationality. Things should have been made easier for me. Also on the personal level, I have been deprived of my wife and children for two years. The Jordanian government has prevented my family from coming to visit me.

The suffering a Syrian national faces in Syria is the same type of suffering I face: constant harassment and prevention of self-expression. One cannot express himself/herself at all in Syria, even if it has nothing to do with the Syrian government.

According to some estimates, there have been about seven thousand Palestinian prisoners who have spent many long years in Syrian prisons. The main charge directed at them is that they are members of Fatah. As I heard from many of these prisoners, the Syrian interrogators used to give them very tough choices: to confess that they were either Mossad agents, Fatah members or Saddam Hussein

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<sup>5</sup>Nayef Hawatmeh is the secretary-general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Abu-Ali Mustafa is a senior official in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

supporters. Many of them didn't have any particular affiliation, but they found themselves compelled to choose the easiest and the safest option, i.e. belonging to a Palestinian national organization.

I want to conclude by discussing the situation Palestinian freedom fighters have reached today, whether in Syria, Lebanon or Jordan. Many of them do not perform well except when fighting. You will find that many Palestinians stopped going to school to join the movement. Others left work. Many of them have grown older. The danger today is that many of these fighters themselves are challenged. The worst weapon used against them is food; they cannot find even a bite to eat. People who expended all of their lives in resistance are now facing a serious problem--the political and financial bankruptcy of Palestinian factions. The factions cannot meet their members' needs. Decisions have been taken to dismiss many commandos from their organizations. Those who have reached the age of fifty or sixty have no other source of living for themselves or their children.

A story comes to my mind now. An Iraqi national came with a groups of Iraqi soldiers to fight in the 1967 war. I saw him about three months ago during a visit to Syria. He talked to me about his suffering. He said that he had committed no mistake:

I had just arrived to fight against the Israelis in al-Karamah. The base where we were stationed was attacked. As a result I escaped to the nearest base. I didn't know of Palestinian factions then. By coincidence, the base I went to was under the control of Fatah. I joined up. In 1982, also by chance, I ended up in Syria. I married a Syrian woman, and we have five children. When Abu-Ammar left Syria in 1982, I joined whatever faction was available to me. It turned out to be the Popular Front. Now they are fighting against me, accusing me of being an outsider.

This man has become a sacrificial lamb in the midst of the bankruptcy I alluded to before.

Everyone feels lost. This state of affairs is compelling many Palestinians to look for any outlet regardless of ideological convictions. This is exemplified by the story of the old man who lost four of his sons as martyrs. People want any solution, regardless of its merits. The factions in the opposition are responsible.