

# education and revolution

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Khaled came to public attention for her role in the TWA Flight 840 hijacking in 1969 and one of the four simultaneous Dawson's Field hijackings the following year as part of the campaign of Black September in Jordan. The first woman to hijack an airplane, she was later released in a prisoner exchange for civilian hostages kidnapped by other PFLP members.

Khaled was born in Haifa, Mandatory Palestine, to Arab parents. Her family fled to Lebanon on 13 April 1948 as part of the 1948 Palestinian exodus, leaving her father behind. At the age of 15, following in the footsteps of her brother, she joined the pan-Arab Arab Nationalist Movement, originally established in the late-1940s by George Habash, then a medical student at the American University of Beirut. The Palestinian branch of this movement became the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine after the 1967 Six-Day War.



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**leila  
khaled**



# ***Education and Revolution***

A chapter excerpt from the book  
*My People Shall Live*

**LEILA KHALED**

1971



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***“MAN IS BORN FREE AND EVERYWHERE HE IS IN CHAINS.” - Rousseau***

As a member of the arab nationalist movement, I was trained to be conscious of the past, present and future. Under-developed people and societies typically lack an awareness of the present and the future, but such consciousness is imperative if we are to be masters of our own lives and environment. We cannot overcome the past and its crippling ideologies unless we gain a free consciousness. Under-developed people live by fate; they look with nostalgia to a “golden past”.

My people and I suffer from these debilities, but we are also living in the ongoing process of history and are trying to determine our future rather than bind ourselves to a dead past. The value of the conquest of Palestine by imperialism and Zionism is that it forced some of us to reexamine the foundation of our society on our own. We discovered that our society was rotten, traditional, unprogressive. Our defeat was indeed our salvation, our means of regeneration and renewal. Now the issue is not restoration, but the construction of a new socialist republic encompassing the entire Arab world.

We must either accept or decline the challenge. If we accept, we must head to the mountains, to the peasants' huts, to the city slums. If we decline, we could lead a life of “happy” servitude under the yoke of Zionism and imperialism and compare our economic well-being today with that of last year or the year before Dayan “liberated” us. Moreover, we could console ourselves by saying “We now have peace and quiet,” and we have more “democracy” under Moshe Dayan and his bulldozers than under Hussein and his Bedouin regiments.

By 1955 I was becoming conscious of present problems and future plans. In that spring, I obtained my elementary school certificate and made plans to go on to secondary school. I was eleven years old and Israel was seven. We went through the same perennial ritual of denouncing Zionism, imperialism and Arab reactionaries on the seventh anniversary of our exile and doing nothing about it. Meanwhile Israel had used those seven years to consolidate her internal front and “integrate” her Afro-Asian population, the Sephardim Jews. “Peace” overtures were made by Moshe Sharrett in 1954, but his government was toppled by the Israeli hawks under the redoubtable leadership of Ben Gurion. However, before Sharrett’s overthrow, the Israeli government was implicated in one of the most insidious plots in the history of diplomacy.

The scheme known as the Lavon affair entailed the blowing up of the US and British embassies and other Western strategic interests in Egypt to prove the instability of the Egyptian regime, and “persuade” Israel’s protectors to remain ensconced at Suez and not to withdraw from the Sudan. The Israelis, of course, had hoped to make the crime appear the work of the Egyptians. Unhappily for them, they were caught red-handed and exposed. The Lavon affair rocked Israeli politics for the next decade. Israeli expansionism began in earnest with the gradual annexation of demilitarised zones set up under the truce agreements of Rhodes (1949), the continued expulsion of Arabs from Israel, and the suppression of the remaining Arab minority in Israel.

More important was the start of the policy of massive reprisals. This was launched on October 15, 1953, with an attack on the village of Kibya and culminated

on February 28, 1955, when Israel invaded the Gaza Strip, demolished Egyptian fortifications and killed and wounded over one hundred and fifty people. The attack did not have its intended effect. Nasser did not withdraw; instead, he encompassed the entire Arab world.

By the autumn of 1955 he concluded the famous arms deal with Czechoslovakia, thereby breaking the Western monopoly as sole armament supplier to the Middle East states and began to move towards pan-Arabism. Everything crystallised in the early autumn of 1955 because Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA and brother of John Foster Dulles, flew to Cairo in September and tried to persuade President Nasser not to go through with the Czech arms deal. This high-handed gesture, denounced by Arab nationalists, was only the first in a series of attempts on the part of the American imperialists to undermine Nasser. Hardly any school child that year escaped learning about these events. I anxiously absorbed details and mastered most of the anti-Western arguments.

My family's economic condition was improved and the atmosphere around the house relaxed. We now had a three-room apartment and hunger was no longer a threat. Two of my sisters were working and mother had made some wise investments. We all felt that the Arabs were taking some overdue first steps towards recovering Palestine and we were still wholeheartedly behind the nationalist movement. 1956 was the year of years in modern Arab history. The Nasserite regime, aided by external and internal pressures, had managed to extract an evacuation agreement from the British in 1954, and by June, 1956 withdrawal was completed. Dulles and Eden then decided to topple Nasser because he was moving in a neutralist direction instead of toe-

all in the beginning. At the moment I admire Lincoln as a liberal in his time, Lenin as the greatest "historic world individual", to be followed only by Mao, Ho, and Guevara. At first, I admired Hitler because I thought he was the enemy of the Jews. Later I found out he classified Arabs as sub-humans, only slightly above the gypsies and the Jews. I admired Napoleon's military conquests and his ability to overcome all obstacles, until I discovered that he did it all for personal glory.

In literature, I read excerpts from Dickens and Shaw. I loved their work and once tried to imitate Shaw in an essay. The teacher didn't appreciate the effort and the C plus was a powerful deterrent to further imitation. I dismissed Shakespeare as a pompous circumlocutionist. In Arabic literature, I liked the poets of the Ommayad and Abbasid periods. That's all the "education" I remember. Since I had plenty of time to spare in 1960-61, I read Gandhi on my own. I liked his moral integrity, but I felt that he was born a slave and never transcended his slavery. As to personal and social relations, I led a "normal" life for an Arab girl. For six years, I liked a fellow Palestinian student of peasant background.

At first his careful avoidance of girls provoked my curiosity. Later I discovered his dislike of women stemmed from watching his mother being raped by Israeli soldiers as they were fleeing from the Safad area in 1948. He abandoned his mother the moment he was able to subsist on his own. I haven't seen Adel since I went to AUB and I wonder whether he is among our fighters or whether he is one of our martyrs. Perhaps he has abandoned hope altogether and is living in the slums of some Arab town. I've had casual boyfriends but never became really attached to any man. The older I grew the more attached I became to the revolution.

certainly no Yankee who can't even speak Arabic, can tell me how to act on the issue and how to fight for my country." The dean considered me a recalcitrant student who needed discipline and she threatened to expel me. "I dare you to do so !"

I screamed in English and declared war on her as a CIA agent and on AUB as the servant of the Pentagon and the oil cartels. "Yankee dean, there will come a time when I will be sitting in your chair and I will expel all of your kind." I stormed out of her office shouting "Long live Palestine, long live the ANM, long live the revolution 1" The dean was shocked, and probably had to take a few tranquilisers before settling down to a day of bureaucratic business. In the spring of 1963, I passed my freshman year, although not with distinction.

I had hoped to return to university and continue my education but money was not available, and I had to look for work. The temporary ending of my schooling made me look back on the value of my education in general. My academic education was on the whole meaningless. It taught me nothing of lasting value. The few sparks of life in these years were all related to the politics of revolution and were outside the curriculum. In the first three or four years of my education, I enjoyed reading history and literature. Towards the end of my student career my interests shifted to mathematics and chemistry and I began planning to specialise either in pharmacology or agriculture.

Agriculture was vital because when we returned to Palestine we would need to cultivate the land on a scientific basis and prove to the world that we could make better use of it than the Zionists. In the first three years of secondary school I read about important figures: Lincoln, Napoleon, Hitler, Lenin. I admired them

ing the Western line. They exerted economic pressures, but he did not yield. Nasser was beginning to sense his potential power and the desire of the Arab masses for a strong, charismatic leader. Eden and Dulles for their part were unable to grasp the profound changes that were taking place.

They thought that if they couldn't overthrow Nasser they could humiliate him and make waves by withdrawing the promised \$70 million loan for the Aswan High Dam project. Nasser responded by nationalising the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956. The Arab giant had suddenly awakened and roared with fury at the West. Mass adulation for Nasser became an Arab phenomenon; Nasserism became a world-wide doctrine. The West was stunned when Arab pilots soon proved that they could operate the Canal just as, if not more, competently than their Western counterparts. The world stopped and listened.

Diplomats from the Third World made pilgrimages to Cairo to declare their solidarity with the Arabs. When Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, journeyed to Cairo carrying the ultimatum of the Canal Users' Association, Nasser gave Menzies an emphatic no and sent him packing. The Arab world applauded; the oppressed saw a spark of hope. Europe and America stood in awe while Nasser became the brown giant of the Third World. Then came the infamous tripartite invasion of Egypt on October 29, 1956, but Nasser held on to the Canal and the reins of power.

Israel had unabashedly conspired with Britain and France to reverse the tide of Arab history and impose a new imperial regime on our world. The 1956 invasion of Egypt ceased on November 6. That day a new baby was born in the Khaled family. We called him Nasser

in honour of President Nasser, to symbolise our first hour of victory since the defeat of 1948. Nasser was number twelve and the last child of Ali Khaled. Now the family could either form a soccer team or take on the “twelve tribes” of Israel. The decision was already made. That autumn was the most exciting period of my childhood. We were engaged in all sorts of feverish activities. It seemed as if the whole school was one family, the whole of Sour was one tribe, the whole of the Arab world was one nation state. It was a time to remember and enjoy, a time of pride and self-confidence. But the enemy was still at the gates. The years from 1956 to 1959 were my period of political apprenticeship as an activist.

Although I had sensed intense political interest and activity in our house since 1954, I somehow did not grasp its full significance and was not really involved in the discussions. Brother Mohammad was a member of the Arab Nationalist Movement and he frequently gave us literature to distribute in Sour or posters to paste up. Sisters Zakiah and Rahaab must have joined the Movement in 1956 or 1957, and they were very active. I began to associate with the Movement people in 1957. I didn't realise, however, how much more there was to the movement than writing, distributing pamphlets, 19 demonstrating or making speeches.

The Movement was active in 1957 when it was widely rumoured that Turkey was planning to invade Syria and overthrow the progressive regime on behalf of the US. We had numerous discussions, but there was no organised youth movement to take action. I was on the periphery and asked my sisters for information which they refused to give because I was not a fully-fledged member of the Movement. But my enthusiasm at associating with liberationists and my emotional com-

ture. Occasionally a student or two would come to the defence of the distributor, arguing that it was essential for us to know what was happening and to hear all points of view. This tactic helped me in organising, and also to know which students were politically inclined. I was never revealed as a nationalist and a member of the underground to the students as a whole, but the administration was clever and they suspected that I was the torch bearer of nationalism at Jewett.

I was called to the dean's office when I was seen publicly distributing literature relating to the fifteenth anniversary of Israel. The dean spoke to me in quick, angry, Americanised English which I pretended not to understand. She was outraged that an AUB student couldn't speak English. She called in a secretary and asked her to act as an interpreter. The dean demanded, “Did you read the student handbook?” “Yes, I did,” I replied through the interpreter. “Did you know that according to article six you could be expelled for distributing political literature without permission?” “Yes.” I said. “Why did you do it then?” I innocently replied that what I was distributing was not political literature at all.

She took the pamphlet from the secretary's hand and read a few passages out loud. “Isn't this a political pamphlet that comes under rule six?” I said I didn't know what a pamphlet was, and that I didn't know what she was talking about anyway. The poor liberal dean started explaining to me that a political pamphlet was a statement that explained, defended and advocated a political position. I agreed that her definition was excellent but contended that it didn't apply in this case because Palestine and her defence were natural and essential to me. “Palestine is not politics to me,” I declared. “It is a question of life and death, and no one,



an Arab. Before we left I spoke to him in Arabic and assured him that I was an Arab, a Palestinian and that every Arab woman was going to be my kind of woman in the near future. He smiled paternally and bid us farewell. That same spring, I once again had to face the problem of being a woman.

The ANM decided to train the first paramilitary contingent of university students. I was among the first to apply and I couldn't be turned down on some flimsy excuse because of my revolutionary credentials and my long experience as an activist. Moreover, since I was on the executive committee of GUPS and a militant from AUB, they were afraid to turn me down. Instead they tried to persuade me not to go because of the harshness of the weather, the physical fatigue and the embarrassment my presence would cause. I assured them I was prepared to face and overcome all these difficulties. They finally agreed to let me go and I underwent the necessary training. 27

Politics were banned on campus, but the ANM was organised as a secret organisation on a cell basis. I had the responsibility of distributing literature at Jewett Hall and pasting posters on trees in the area. I did it secretly, towards five o'clock in the morning or about one a.m. before I went to bed. One night I was caught by a watchman who at first appeared severe and threatening, but who turned out to be a member of our underground. It was quite a rewarding experience to find a comrade in the middle of the night. From then on he provided me with information regarding security and advised me when it was safe to work. Being caught meant expulsion without trial. Inside Jewett Hall I was on my own. I placed bundles of literature in the women's mail boxes and simultaneously periodically denounced those who imposed on us that useless litera-

mitment to the cause offset any misgivings I might have had about not being a participating member. In 1958, under artillery fire from the Lebanese army, the distinction between member and nonmember ceased. Sour was under siege. The false friends of Palestine and Arabism began to show their teeth immediately after the formation of the United Arab Republic in February of 1958.

To protect their own tottering regimes the Hashemites of Iraq and Jordan formed their own counterfederation, probably under Western instigation. The whole Arab world was polarised: pan-Arabism versus provincial sovereignties; revolution versus counter-revolution; Cairo versus Baghdad. In this political context the Lebanese President Chamoun, the darling of Western diplomats, decided to seek a second presidential term. The Arab Nationalist Movement as well as other forces, progressive and reactionary, sought to block the constitutional amendment proposed by his party. Because of the constitutional deadlock, the conflict of antagonistic social forces, and the opportunism of merchants and politicians on both sides, a civil war erupted on May 10, two days after the assassination of Nasib Al-Matni, a renowned Arab political editor.

In Sour local opposition to the Arab Nationalist Movement was feeble. It was easy for us to seize the city and run its government in the interests of the people and the rebellion. The Island of Sour proper was under our absolute control. But the army held the gate at the northern end of town, where the opposition had numerous followers, including the local member of parliament, his tribe and its clients. Tempers in Sour had been running high since April 2, 1958 when the gendarmerie had shot and killed Maan Halawah, a prominent nationalist leader. Most people in Sour considered

his murder unwarranted and unprovoked. The Solidarity Club of Sour, however, interpreted Halawah's murder as a declaration of war on the Arab Nationalist Movement as well as an attempt by the Lebanese authorities to intimidate the city and foil the nationalists. Their premonitions proved correct.

A three-day curfew was imposed, followed by a round-up of "political agitators". When the people discovered what was happening, they broke the curfew, stormed the police station, and released the prisoners. This time Mohammad Kassem, another distinguished nationalist, was killed, and I had my first brush with death, escaping by only a few centimetres. Although I had participated in practically every demonstration in Sour for the past six years (1952 until April 1958), it still seemed like just a lot of fun. I had not seen anyone murdered since the man who died in front of our house in Haifa, when I had been safely hidden under the staircase.

Maan Halawah, however, was gunned down by the Lebanese gendarmes while shouting nationalist slogans as he was raised shoulder high by comrades. Mohammad Kassem was shot when the gendarmes tried to re-impose their curfew on Sour. I was by his side, handing him stones to hurl at the gendarmes when he was cut down. I ran screaming for help. When help came he was still alive and we rushed him to the hospital in a broken old car. I thought he was going to live. The surgeon came out of the operating room after a few minutes. He walked slowly towards us, then solemnly offered his condolences trying to hide his own tears.

For the first time in my life I knew the loss of a comrade in battle. I cried for days. The city mourned the loss of two great comrades and gave them heroes' fu-

ident Dodge had protested at the establishment of the state of Israel to President Harry Truman of the United States and had been axed from his post for it.) The university administration braced itself for counteraction. Amidst an atmosphere of high tension, GUPS proposed that a student committee be formed to represent Palestinian students before the Jordanian embassy.

The committee was formed and a number of prominent foreign students were elected to the committee. I was included in the group. The same day, we descended in full force on the Jordanian embassy and told the ambassador in no uncertain terms that we would slash his throat if he withdrew the passports. I did most of the talking and my fellow students backed me to the hilt. Moments after our arrival, the embassy was surrounded by the Lebanese gendarmes, and a whole contingent, of what appeared to be armed intelligence service officers, stormed into our meeting office.

The ambassador seemed to know exactly what was happening although he claimed not to have called in the police. In the presence of the whole committee, he had to eat his words and advise the police that we were not a gang of criminals, merely a committee of AUB students visiting his excellency. The guards surveyed each one of us and left the room. I resumed the violent threats and insisted that we be given written assurances that passports wouldn't be cancelled. The ambassador said that he was not instructed to give such assurances, but he was authorised to deny the report and give us his word of honour that such action was not contemplated. I sensed a feeling of victory and drank Arab coffee with the ambassador and assured him that we would be back if any action were taken against Palestinian students. Since we were talking in English and I was being so forceful, he presumed that I was not

ter to a new superpower. Judy was an imperial citizen, however liberal and idealistic she may have been. I was a Palestinian Arab woman without a homeland, living in exile in an American 26 colony in Ras Beirut. She had everything to lose, I had everything to gain. One's social consciousness is indeed determined by one's social conditions. Although politics were banned on campus and GUPS' (General Union of Palestinian Students) political activities were low-keyed, we engaged in confrontation politics in the spring of 1963.

The proclamation of the republic of Palestine based in the city of Nablus provided us with the occasion. Needless to say, Nablus, before and after the proclamation, remained under the firm control of King Hussein and his tribal soldiery. But there was a fair amount of agitation that reflected Palestinian dissatisfaction with Hussein, the Arab states, and the general social condition. Moreover, new Palestinian organisations appeared on the scene, and by the autumn the Arab states were forced to take notice and start talking about Palestinian unity.

At AUB we held demonstrations in support of Palestinian demands for a place under the sun. The administration initially turned a deaf ear to our activities, hoping that the spring offensive was a passing phenomenon. We were prompted to move quickly by the widespread accurate rumours that the Jordanian embassy had called in Palestinian students and threatened to cancel their Jordanian passports if they didn't cease their political agitation. We responded with more demonstrations, an action that gathered momentum rapidly, involving practically all the old politicians of Beirut and a significant proportion of foreign students. (This was the first time that foreign students at AUB had rallied to the cause of the Palestinians since 1948, when Pres-

nerals. But that was only the beginning. The summer of 1958 was a summer of mournings. The para-military forces and the army of Chamoun advanced like a pack of mercenaries to ravage our city and bring us the blessings of American weaponry. That summer, I do not remember sleeping a whole night without interruption, for I was a soldier at thirteen, and I had sentinel duty and other political and military obligations. I was anxious to be a good soldier. 20

As the Lebanese divided and brother killed brother, it became evident that too many foreign fingers were on the triggers. On July 16, 1958, American Marines landed in Lebanon, two days after the Iraqi people overthrew the Hashamite dynasty there and executed Nuri al-Said and Abdul-Ilah, Britain's most faithful Arab agents. The Lebanese-Arab people witnessed the awesome majesty of the sixth fleet. Unhappily, however, for America, it was too late to restore Nuri and company to power. But they stayed in Lebanon, deadlocked the civil war, and declared it a draw. Arab political commentators wrote books on "Neither Victorious Nor Vanquished".

Fortunately the summer of 1958 in Sour was not as devastating as we had feared. The destruction was mitigated by an uneasy, unwritten local accord with the army: the ANM controlled the town centre, the army held the outskirts of the city. The continuous bombardment of our positions was nerve-racking and frightening. In addition the army frequently cut off food supplies. But we improvised and managed. At one stage, our area was being starved and our men's morale was weakening because of the bombardment of the army and their own hunger. We had about ten kilos of flour at home and I decided that I could bake enough bread for the men. But instead of baking it I kneaded the entire ten kilos and fried the dough in olive oil. Now I

could supply a regiment, not only a few dozen fighters. The image of a revolutionary Jesus blessing the fish and feeding the multitudes came to mind, but I performed no miracles. The crucial part came when I delivered the bread to the lines. I was caught in the crossfire of the two sides; each thought I was the enemy, but apparently neither was prepared to gun me down. I was amazed by the speed of the bullets as they buzzed by, and was somehow surprised to see a real battle scene raging, particularly with me in its midst.

Until then I had thought that battles were like demonstrations. I quickly learned about battles and screamed to both sides to stop fighting because I only had bread on my tray which I carried on top of my head as befits a Palestinian maiden. Fortunately, one of the comrades recognised me and signalled to his men to stop firing. I ran in his direction when he called my name and reached the hungry men safely. Later I learned another lesson of war. I was ready to choke any Lebanese soldier I could lay my hands on when one day a soldier walked into our house asking for a drink of water. I replied that I'd give him a drink of poison before I'd give him a drink of water. He seemed taken aback: "Why would you do such a thing?" he asked. I said, "Because you're murdering our men." He smiled and cautiously replied, "Miss, if we had been aiming our bombardment on your men and city, the whole thing would have gone up in smoke by now.

We have orders to fire and we are firing, but we are not aiming. We merely fire to keep your men edgy and in place, hoping that they won't try to attack us or attempt to cross to our side of town. Tell your comrades to stay put, otherwise we will be forced to wipe out the whole area." Mother and I listened carefully. I told him he was a liar and he deserved to die of thirst and star-

girls. I asked Judy how she could do it. She passed it off, "It was all nice, clean American fun with no strings attached." I laughed and admired her for her amorality. But Judy and I were more than room-mates. We were intellectual companions. She lectured me on American government, values and social order, and I lectured her on the Arabs. She was a liberal Kennedy fan; I was a Nasser admirer. The test of our friendship came in October, 1962, a decisive month in America and the Arab world. On October 22, 1962, Kennedy threatened to invade Cuba unless the Soviet missiles were dismantled and removed from Cuba. On October 2, the UAR had officially sent its troops to the Yemen, to bolster the republican regime which had overthrown the medieval regime. Judy and I had long and heated dialogues concerning these events. The dialogues were mutually instructive, but neither of us convinced the other. Judy held that it was right for America to demand the removal of missiles from Cuba. The missiles, she claimed, constituted a strategic threat to her country's national security.

I considered it criminal and barbarous on the part of the United States to threaten atomic holocaust unless it got its own way. Judy regarded the dispatching of UAR troops to Yemen as an invasion. I saw it as a moral obligation on the part of President Nasser, a noble gesture which he undertook to save the revolution from its corrupt enemies. She asserted that Nasser was an ambitious politician who sought to seize the Gulf's oil and use it for his personal aggrandisement, and I countered that we had a right to that oil and it should be used for the benefit of the Arab people. She saw Nasser's activities as part of a Soviet plot to occupy the Arab world. I explained to Judy that we were not fighting just to expel the colonial and neo-colonial powers from our region only to offer our homeland on a silver plat-

English, and math. Only one of my four professors was of Arabic origin, and I couldn't tell the difference between him and his three other fellow professors. They were all American in outlook, behaviour, and manners. They were pseudo-ivy leaguers in a provincial school that only excelled in producing CIA spies and ministers. I don't know which was the lesser evil of the two.

My nominal education was taking place at AUB; my real education was in the lecture hall of the Arab Cultural Club of Beirut and in the ranks of the ANM. At the ACC I became acquainted with distinguished Arab intellectuals such as Joseph Mogheizel, the club's president, and Mohsen Ibrahim, the editor of Al-Hurriyah, then official voice of the Arab Nationalist Movement. I also met Teysier Koubaa, the president of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS). The group of students and intellectuals I met in that academic year now occupy leadership roles in the Popular Front and the Arab left. AUB was an intellectual graveyard for me.

It was a "finishing" school for the rich children of the Middle East and a social club for the colonial elite of the Arab world. Student government was banned and the university was run like an American corporation. Students whose fees were not paid in full were often forbidden to attend classes. The only permissible activities on campus were dances, parties and plays. No open political clubs were allowed. There were no demonstrations, no political rallies, no guest speakers. I lived at Jewett Hall, the women's residence, where I had an American room-mate named Judy Sinninger. Her social life never ceased to amaze me. One week she had three different dates, with three different men and she kissed each one of them with the same passion in the grand room at Jewett in front of a lot of other

vation as well. Mother relented and told me to give the soldier a drink in return for the good news he brought us. I reluctantly did so insisting that he was an enemy soldier and he should be treated accordingly. "We should take him prisoner," I announced. He gestured at his gun as he stood in the door chuckling over my outrageous threats. He suggested that I try to attack his side of town if I were so courageous. Mother pleaded with him to tell his comrades not to fire so mercilessly on the city and men and he in turn assured us that he was a Lebanese who loved his country and did not wish to see it destroyed.

In 1958, having proved my mettle in battle, I had earned the right to candidate membership in the Arab Nationalist Movement. My mother strongly disapproved of the political activities of the girls in the family. She felt that now that the civil war was over the girls should stay at home and leave the politics to men. Mother had no objections to brother Mohammad manning the trenches, staying out late at night or going off on unknown political missions for weeks at a time. To her, Mohammad was a man so he did the work of men. Such was her upbringing. She said she was also afraid of scandalous talk in the neighbourhood about women in politics. Mother knew that social ostracism would result if any one of us stepped out of line.

My sisters assured her that they were mature and 21 capable of looking after themselves. Besides, they said, the men they associated with were respectful, political gentlemen with high principles. None was out to violate any girl, especially girl comrades. Nothing would convince mother. Father was a little reluctant and suspicious, but he favoured our position and it was finally he and Mohammad who came to the rescue. They succeeded in persuading mother not to disrupt the polit-

ical work of my sisters. When we were kicked out of Palestine, they argued, Zionists did not distinguish between men and women. Women constituted over one half of the Palestinian people and they too were exiled. The Israelis trained their women to fight and granted them civil liberties.

If we wished to defeat the Israelis we must outplay them in their own game. Mother was silenced by one final question: "Do you wish to see Palestine liberated?" father asked. "Yes," she said unhesitatingly. Mohammad reasoned: "Mother, you cannot then oppose the participation of your daughters in political life, can you?" Mother smiled. "I do not mind Zakiah and Ra-haab joining," she relented, "but this child politician (referring to me) must stay at home." I was the sacrificial lamb of the deal, but the right of women to participate was conceded.

Since my sisters were allowed to participate in politics, it was inevitable that I should be allowed to do so eventually. In the meantime I decided to continue my activities clandestinely. In 1959, however, when mother discovered that I had become a fully-fledged member of the ANM, she tried to forbid me from going to meetings. I couldn't very well offend her by flaunting my membership card. I told her that I was merely doing what I always did as a political supporter of the Movement, but mother remained unconvinced. On the night of a very important meeting which I was determined to attend I resorted to subterfuge. I took a bath and put on my pyjamas to convince mother that I was not going anywhere that night. She must have thought that she had won the battle and that her "child politician" was recovering her senses. As zero hour approached, I made my move and, still in my pyjamas, I went by mother in the kitchen saying casually

American University of Beirut in 1962-63 due to the generosity of brother Mohammad, who was working as an engineer in Kuwait. I scored the second highest average at the AUB entrance exam: eighty-seven per cent, which should have entitled me to a scholarship, but for some reason or other, I was not given one. But I was delighted to have passed and wanted to enroll as quickly as possible before I got railroaded into some uncreative role like office work or marriage and baby-production.

When I arrived in Beirut in late August of 1962, my earthly possessions consisted of fifty Lebanese pounds. I thought I could register on the installment plan. The AUB registrar, however, didn't believe in that basic American principle. I did all I could to persuade him to let me register before my place was taken by someone else; I promised to pay the balance before the beginning of the academic year. He wouldn't budge. But a girl in the office sympathised with me. "How will you raise the balance for your fees Miss?" she asked. "I have a brother in Kuwait who promised to send me to university if I passed the examination, and I did," I was quick to explain. "Go and telegraph your brother," she instructed. I ran to downtown Beirut and telegraphed Mohammad. The cost was twelve pounds. I now had only thirty-eight Lebanese pounds.

I realised how quickly I could blow the money and end up penniless and unregistered. I waited and waited and a whole day elapsed before word came that the money was coming. I smiled to myself with satisfaction. My brother, like all good Arab men, honoured his promises. I flew back to AUB and proudly presented the registrar with my fees. He uttered a few bureaucratic words and I was registered. At AUB I enrolled in the four required freshman courses: chemistry, Arabic literature,

four years. A new age dawned in the Arab East while the Arab West inched its way to independence in Algeria through armed struggle. That spring, I obtained my secondary school baccalaureate and went back to Sour for the summer, hoping to go to AUB in the autumn if I passed the entrance examinations. Sour was the vortex of nationalism that summer and every conceivable question regarding the future of Arabism was raised and debated. The Movement was in disarray, but we took heart, because Nasser was building rockets and fleets.

On July 23, 1962, Nasser celebrated the first decade of the Egyptian revolution by displaying “Egyptian” made rockets, ships, tanks and planes. He announced to the world that Egyptian rockets would reach just to the south of Beirut. He and Amer saluted the parade and acted as if they were Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt combined. We were elated; last all of Israel was within the firing range of Arab rocketry. Nasser also declared that Egypt’s fleet was the greatest in the Eastern Mediterranean and we felt the time may have come to take revenge even on Turkey for her butcheries of the First World War. In the summer of 1962, I once again had to face the problem of being a Palestinian Arab woman.

My sisters in the West speak of two kinds of oppression: class and sexual. I had to face four kinds of oppression: national, social (the weight of traditions and habits), class and sexual. At this point I was particularly prone to oppression because I was a woman. My family professed equality like most modern families, but didn’t practise it. Although I passed the baccalaureate examination with flying colours and my brother Khaled failed, my family insisted on sending him to university instead. I was a very low priority item compared to my brothers. I was finally able to attend the

“I am a little bored, Mother, I am going to visit my girl friend next door.” She raised no objections. I headed directly to the meeting hall at the Solidarity Club. My pyjama debut startled the members as I made my way to an empty seat.

They were shaken by what they regarded as immoral behaviour. I was blasted for violating Arab decorum and polite womanly behaviour. They were almost ready to pass a motion of censure and perhaps expulsion. Some of the reactionaries thought my appearance in pyjamas was a tradition-trampling, sex-enticing episode. Tradition-trampling it might have been; sex-enticing it was not. I was terribly disturbed by their male chauvinism and self-righteousness. I stayed through the meeting and left still angry, because my commitment to the cause was not appreciated and the personal difficulties I encountered at home were not taken into consideration.

How could we liberate Palestine and the Arab homeland, if we ourselves were not liberated? How could we advocate equality and keep over half-the female half-of the human race in bondage? That would be the next battle waged at the Sour Solidarity Club. Mother never found out about this escapade, but she soon reconciled herself to my vocation and acceded to my political demands. It took the ANM nearly a decade to start tapping to the full human reservoir of women. The school of the Evangelical Churches was not equipped to provide schooling for the secondary school baccalaureates or beyond. I had to go elsewhere to continue my education.

The Saida School for Girls was going to be my first opportunity to act completely on my own. I was excited by my newly-won freedom as a young adult, but a lit-

tle upset that school rules required that a student have two residential years to qualify for examination to the baccalaureate. That meant I was going to lose one of the two years I had gained when I started school. I thought repeating the fifth secondary grade was no tragedy and rationalised it as a splendid opportunity to do great political work. But the autumn of 1960 was the year of the international summit at the UN, not the year of great power rivalry or regional wars. Everything seemed quiet and conducive to reflective prolonged study.

President Nasser went to the UN; he looked tame compared to 1956. Diplomacy seemed to have replaced revolution; the Third World was coming of age perhaps a little too soon. The only hot spot in the Arab homeland was Algeria. I had to adjust to a new social and political environment after the turbulent years of Sour and await the coming of a revolutionary messiah. He never came. Palestine needed one, but the Popular Front was not born until November of 1967. In Saida there was much time to spare and little action to engage in. Here I was no longer in a completely Palestinian enclave.

This school was highly apolitical—a graveyard for a revolutionary. I was placed in a house with twelve other girls. A few were Palestinians with whom I thought I could communicate. But to them Palestine was in the distant and remote past. They wanted to obtain an “education” and find husbands. What a travesty of womanhood. I did not give up hope, however, and tried to accommodate myself to their mode of living. I was convivial by nature and loved to be with people, but I felt somewhat lonely in the midst of these eleven girls. I took heart when I noticed another lonely person. Her name was Miss McNight, an American black who had

bankruptcy of our feudal leaders and the collapse of our social structure ushered in the age of the colonels’ regimes – regimes that were progressive, reformist, Arabist. Meanwhile, the Zionists proceeded to establish a racist, exclusive society where East European Zionists, Polish and Russian, dominated the government, political parties, trade unions, bureaucracy, and business. Afro-Asian Jews were the target of discrimination, class exploitation and European contempt.

The Arab inhabitants, the rightful owners of Palestine, were placed under military administration and used along with the Arab Jews as a cheap labour supply. I concluded with a plea to free Palestine. Such a state of affairs cannot continue and we must not allow it to continue. We can end it through Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine. Our goal can be reached if the UAR was expanded and all the Arab states become one nation-state. We must fight for one Arab nation, for unity, for freedom, for socialism. We must defeat enemy number one, America, the supplier of Hawk missiles to Israel, and we must seize our own oil resources.

We must learn to emulate our Algerian brethren in order to liberate Palestine. Long live Palestine, Arab and revolutionary! The students applauded heartily; they seemed to have been favourably impressed by my knowledge of Palestinian history and my commitment to unity. At that moment neither I nor they foresaw the breakup of the UAR on September 28, 1961 when Syria withdrew, thereby dashing the Arab hope for unity and forcing the Palestinian people to re-examine their whole strategy of liberation. The breakup of the UAR was the temporary collapse of hope, and yet it also brought about the rise of a Palestinian revolutionism. Palestinian organisations of all sorts suddenly sprang up everywhere and mushroomed in the next three or



ten percent of the population of the area, but the draftees of the Declaration had the temerity to refer to our people as the “non-Jewish population” rather than referring to the Jews as a minority which could have religious rights in Palestine. The British were powerful and liked to have powerful friends with capital. The Zionists were prepared to pay any price, make any deal, offer every conceivable sacrifice, commit any crime to reach their goal. They did and in 1948 Israel was established over the corpse of the Palestinian people.

With the diplomatic support of the great powers, they were able to attain their objective quickly because Britain and France divided the Arab East among themselves into seven states and imposed on the Arabs a so-called “sacred trust” of civilisation under Western tutelage. Then the allies suppressed the Arab National Movement and crushed the revolutionary elements that launched the Great Arab Revolution of 1916. Much more significantly, Britain allowed the Zionists to establish dual power in Palestine and denied the same privilege to the Arabs. The cards were stacked in favour of Zionism.

To undo this conspiracy we revolted on a number of occasions against the mandate and Zionist colonisation and fought for our national independence. But the enemy was in our ranks and our own ruling class was finally responsible for our betrayal. The 1936 General Strike was a classic example in which the peasants and workers led the revolution and forced the upper class to join forces with them. They did, but only to abort and sacrifice the revolution on the altar of personal advantage. When the war of 1948 came, our ruling class had abandoned us to the wind. We were leaderless, dispersed and on our own. The Zionist plucked the land from our hearts with little cost and less effort. The

come all the way from America to teach in a private school in Saida. I was a little startled at first until I learned the reason for her choice. In Lebanon she was treated as a person and given the deference we accord teachers in the Arab world; in America, she was regarded as a coloured woman, an inferior, perhaps even a sex object. Miss McNight and I quickly became good friends. It was natural for two strange black women in Saida to pool their resources and offer each other aid and comfort.

Miss McNight was a darling of a woman-vivacious, always smiling, quick witted -the model of a big sister for me. But our politics differed. She was surprised when I expressed deep hatred of the Jews and taught me not to make sweeping declarations. She pointed out that not all Jews were Zionists; some were, in fact, antiZionist. I reflected on her distinctions and tried to adopt them into my thinking. The anniversaries of the Balfour Declaration (November 2) and the Partition of Palestine (November 29) were approaching. The time came to test who stood where on my campus. I started to agitate for a general strike of schools, Sour style, to commemorate the anniversaries.

In Sour, my school was always in the lead. We used to commence the marches and force all the other schools to close down and join in the demonstrations. It was not to be fulfilled in Saida. Miss McNight appreciated the idea but even she didn't like the idea of a general strike, the forced closing down of schools, the holding of massive public rallies or the storming of police stations. She was a graduate of Martin Luther King's school of non-violence. She stood for prayer and the education of the enemy. I was a militant revolutionary who was born in the crucible of revolutionary upheaval. Despite our differences of opinion, Miss McNight

and I remained friends. As a member of an oppressed race she was sympathetic to my cause. She used her influence to persuade the Lebanese Arab principal to let me hold on Arab soil a peaceful student rally in support of the Palestinian cause. The principal only agreed reluctantly, thinking she was doing a favour to her neighbours from Palestine.

The rally, however, was postponed from November to May 15, 1961, the thirteenth anniversary of the Zionist state. Then I delivered my first public lecture on Palestine. I spoke of the history of Palestine and Zionism and my hopes for the future. Zionism as a political concept came to the fore at the turn of the twentieth century. It was at the outset a religious idea-old Jews pilgrimaged to Jerusalem to spend their last days there and die in the holy land. Zionism as a word was coined in 1886 by Ben Acher, a European Jew who had never been to Palestine. It was Herzl who started the political side of Zionism in his pamphlet *The Jewish State*. He was an Austrian, assimilated Jew who cared very little about Jewry prior to the 1880s.

As a political correspondent covering the Dreyfus trial in Paris, he was converted to Zionism. He was appalled that France, the most civilised nation in Europe, was blatantly persecuting a fellow Jew and making him a scapegoat for a crime he never committed. Herzl felt that only in a Jewish state could the Jew become a "normal" person and lead a life of inner peace. He used all his energies and capitalist contacts to mobilise European Jewry and convened them at the first Zionist congress in 1897, at Basle. His programme was adopted and the World Zionist Organisation was formed with Herzl as 23 chairman. Herzl sought aid from the Kaiser to realise his dream. He journeyed to Istanbul and sought the aid of the Sublime Porte. He told his

prospective patrons that Jewish capital, knowledge and skill would be placed at the disposal of Berlin and Istanbul if the Porte granted access to the Jews in the southern part of Arabia, Syria, and Palestine. But the Porte, fearing the reaction of his Arab subjects, was unable to confer such a title. Herzl was forced to look elsewhere for allies.

He found one in Britain, the colonial power that occupied Egypt, the Sudan and Arab Gulf. He repeated his offer to the British and argued that a Jewish state would be a great bulwark against Arab revolution and a local sentinel to guard Britain's vital interests in the area which included the Suez Canal and the trading routes to the Far East. From the very beginning the idea of an Israeli state was sold to the Western powers as a wedge to keep the Arabs divided. The British appreciated the proffered co-operation of the international Jewish bourgeoisie and offered such land areas as the Argentine and Uganda where the Jews could settle.

Although Herzl preferred a Jewish state in Palestine, he accepted the Uganda offer and sold it to his compatriots at the World Zionist Organisation congress of 1903. Shortly afterwards, Herzl died and the Uganda project was buried. Britain also offered Al-Arish in Egypt on the Mediterranean Coast, the area nearest to Palestine, and that proposal was turned down by the Zionist diehards. (In the autumn of 1971, Israel controlled not only the whole of Palestine, but also Al-Arish, Sinai and the Golan Heights of Syria.)

Zionist colonies were set up in Palestine and thousands of Jews were filtered in because of the incompetence and corruption of the Ottoman administration. By 1917, when the Zionists extracted the Balfour Declaration from the British, the Jews constituted less than