

Highlights from a Life's Journey

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I was born a female in a country where the male has double the share of the female; in fact, even more. I was not at peace with this reality and I have never accepted it. This early rejection of discrimination has shaped the course of my life. And it just happened that my country of birth and residence, Lebanon, during that time, went through many conflicts, mostly violent, and culminated in a 15-year civil war whose repercussions continue to signal the possibility of sliding back into conflict despite the devastation, destruction and pain it had brought on.

Self-affirmation and the ability to take action and excel have steered my choices. I was diligent in my studies at the village school to prove to my family that I was no less capable than my brother, who attended a private school. I graduated from a public high school in a richly diverse area. We fought to ensure that the children of the poor receive a good education and to open applied colleges at the Lebanese University. I was a champion of the Palestinian cause, and then the war broke out. We became «us» and «they»... It was «imposed on us» we were told, just as they were told. So they said, so we believed it. It became a battle for existence: «either us or them». The other became an enemy whose killing and elimination was legitimized.

I'm not a bystander by nature; I got involved in the war. I lived as a fighter armed with the defense of my «rightful» cause. I also experienced it as a civilian after giving birth to my daughter, who introduced me to fear as soon as she came into existence.

During war, violence has the upper hand, and despotism spreads its wings. Peace retreats in its broad sense, from being open to many possibilities, such as security and stability. But «peace» derives new forms to express its presence, such as inhabiting our small things and simple day-to-day routines. We support each other, and we help the displaced and those in need. Women shed the weight of obsolete, forgotten burdens as a result of the destruction of what exists. Despite the shelling, killing, destruction and senseless death, war has not been able to defeat human beings' natural need to live in peace—even if at irregular intervals. I was never a fan of weapons, it is cold as a neutral force, I took up arms to be on an equal footing as men, and fought for the right of women to be decisionmakers. I lost many loved ones and friends. I worked on several sites and in different fields—I gave comrades haircuts on the front, bought clothes for them, and listened to Jamal, a martyr, before his premature departure to the irony of glory as he dreamt of eating his mother's lentils dish. I stole my father's car to transport the many wounded on the day of the incursions. I did

not mourn anyone as I did Kamal Jumblatt. I mourned a dream that was shattered. And the defeats followed. After my marriage, I would sneak into my marital home so that my neighbors would not notice my husband's absence during our «honeymoon» for a more serious mission. When he would come back, we would spend the night in anticipation of the parting to come. The cause is the foundation, for «big causes» fuel war, consigning the individual self to the position of an accessory or a theatrical prop for its own victories or defeats.

My daughter was born in 1983, and I returned to the «natural» role in the home. I became a mother and a civilian, and started a different journey. I will not forget the day I was walking in the streets of Beirut crying because our neighbor, the store owner, who used to put my groceries on the tab until the end of the month, did not have milk to feed my child. I was besieged by the fall of the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound, my neediness, my helplessness, and my poverty. Beirut was besieged by explosions here and there. The children's playground at the entrance to the building was a moment of relative calm. I remember the iron gate as prison bars.

In war as in peace, the people in my country are not equal, whether men or women. Those who hold power have privileges that keep them away from the course of life of others... whether they are figures, subjects or the marginalized. Men are superior to women in wars—they are stronger physically, and the most inclined to despotism and violence... Perhaps because nature has sowed the blessing of motherhood in women... I do not know! That is why men, especially the defeated ones, are more fragile after a war... Therefore, it is inevitable for women to bear the main burden of reconstruction and the cleaning up of the dirt stuck in a state that has almost resigned from carrying out its functions.

The children grew up... A life has gone by... There's time for self-reflection... And the questions gush out... I asked myself repeatedly: What did we get out of the war? Was there really a greater noble cause that justified this immense destruction of our

country, our people and the future of our children? What do we fear and what do they fear?

When I met those I wanted to isolate and those who wanted to eliminate me, we discovered how little we knew about each other. Both sides were fighting the shadow of their fears. It was not easy to wrest away caution and get closer to the «enemy». It is a road that starts with doubt about what we memorized and learned, and to get rid of our fears by purifying what is inside of us from the sins of hatred of the other who is different and attempts to eliminate him. To get to a point where we work together to prevent a repetition of the war.

...After some hesitation, I met with Fighters for Peace, a group of former combatants and civil society activists from all walks of life, who have come together to establish a new culture that respects pluralism, ascendancy of peace over killing, dialogue over fighting, and love over hatred. They believe that there is no winner in any civil war, everyone is a loser, a conviction recognized through blood and remorse.

«The world has become a dangerous place to live in, not because of the bad guys, but because others do not do anything about it», said one of them.

That is why today I am fighter for peace.

We will never be identical, not in color, sex, or religious, political or mood affiliation. Meadow flowers rejoice in the diversity of form and color. That is why they rush spring... Even fall is slow to bare itself to leave open the possibilities to trees. And there's a reason why creatures were created in so many species, whims and lifestyles. Let us learn from the law of nature, enjoy its greatness and preserve it.

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