

Palestinian Women Active in all Fields

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The suffering of the Palestinian community in Lebanon is chief, but what largely alleviates it is the fact that the women of this community are very active in various fields; they take initiatives and they dream. Below are profiles of four of them.

Fadia Loubani

Director of "Peace for You" Association in Burj el Barajneh Camp

An active, visionary woman. That's how Fadia describes herself, and if you know her you will agree that these two qualities apply to her quite well. In 1986, the Burj el-Barajneh camp for Palestinian refugees where she lives, was ravaged by the war and the siege which led to the inability of the camp's children to reach their schools located outside the camp. Therefore, Fadia established with a number of women in the camp a temporary school in an empty yard, so that the students don't waste time. She was 17 years old at that time. After the war ended, she wanted to benefit from the experience and established a kindergarten alongside other four women and started collecting symbolic contributions which enabled her to build a classroom. Over the years, she received assistance from Palestinian and international organizations that made the project become today a social center that hosts kindergarten children and women's activities, and be equipped with a playground and a stage where a theatrical performance was held last year that saw Fadia becoming a playwright and an actress. Today she has two dreams: the first is to establish a sewing workshop that employs women living in the camp, regardless of their nationalities, to empower them economically, and the second is to build a fully equipped theater within the camp that will be a space for free expression and interaction. Given what she has been able to accomplish in her previous projects, one or both of these dreams could likely come true!



Mira Sidawi

Actress, Filmmaker and Writer

Mira is always looking for ways to express herself freely. She found one when she entered the Lebanese University to study theatre, and later filmmaking became an additional means. Between theatre and cinema, she got engaged in writing short stories and today her various and interlocked projects include the completion of her first novel. After graduating from university, she founded with playwrights, mostly Palestinian although some are Lebanese, the Camp Theatre Troupe based in Burj el-Barajneh camp. She then trained a group of Kanafani Foundation children on theatre, and at the end of the training produced a play about Ghassan Kanafani, whose name the foundation holds. Her most acclaimed plays are "Ayoubia", which relates the stories of Palestinian women from the camp, and the recently screened play "It's All My Fault", about the significance of having a child in the camp and the associated difficulties and funny situations. In cinema, she directed the documentary "Four Wheels Camp", which sarcastically tackles the issue of death in Palestinian camps, and she is now finalizing her second movie, "Al Jidar: The Wall", which follows the lives of young people from Shatila camp who tried to bring Pink Floyd to the camp. Mira recognizes and creates her lost homeland through her individual achievement and through a rebellion that is far from raising haughty slogans and self-victimization and closer to the normal daily struggle. This is probably what makes her artistic practice special.



Leila El Ali

Executive Director of Najdeh Association

Social work is inseparable from the political activity for Leila, who comes from a militant family and whose militant personality began to form with the rise of the national tide in Lebanon in the early seventies, and then further evolved during her university years, which coincided with the restrictions on Palestinian presence after the invasion and departure of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and during which she became a student activist and later president of the Youth Union of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She then went to work for the Najdeh Association, which is active in Palestinian camps in the areas of relief, vocational training and women's empowerment. Leila lived most of her life in the Shatila camp, which she remembers as open to its Lebanese surroundings, and a home for activists from all over the world, and she is saddened by the marginalization and isolation that the camp goes through nowadays. In her work with Najdeh, she insists that the diverse assistance should be given to Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and everyone who needs it because she believes that the distinction between those in need is immoral. Leila is also one of the right-to-work campaign founders that calls for Palestinians to be fully granted this right in Lebanon.



Few hours before the 1982 massacre in Shatila Camp, Leila miraculously went out with her family, and came back after the slaughter to see dead bodies scattered on the ground, including the bodies of Lebanese neighbors. But despite this traumatic experience and others over the years, she decided to remain an active woman and stay always optimistic that some justice can be achieved in this world.

Ghada Kassem

Trainer in Popular Education and Adult Education

Ghada has been active in community work for 33 years, and started her activity with the Middle East Council of Churches in Saida, being the daughter of the Ain el-Hilweh camp located in the city. She then worked in the field of community health for 13 years before embarking in 1999 on the Ecumenical Project for Popular Education, as a teacher and designer of educational programs for adults. These programs are based on the development of knowledge in a variety of areas in combination with literacy, and aim to develop life skills that enable participants from both genders to achieve better employment opportunities. The Ecumenical Project also provides training to the cadres of Palestinian and Lebanese institutions alike in the field of popular education. Ghada is also a human rights activist who contributes to the struggle for Palestinian rights in Lebanon, and is also an activist in women's work and aspires to establish a non-partisan coalition for Palestinian women that non-working women can join. Ghada has three daughters who have all finished their university education, and thus giving birth to three new active Palestinian women can be added to her achievements!

