



ABOVE:

Palestinian children play "Arabs and Jews", a children's game in which they act out their emotional trauma. Some children throw stones, some play Israeli soldiers and others play distraught mothers weeping over the bodies of their slain children.

FACING PAGE:

In a Cambodian hospital with her father who has had his leg and his life shattered by a landmine. His child cannot know the implications of this personal disaster for a family whose breadwinner has lost much of his capacity to work. With no social security, the chances are that they are condemned to poverty.



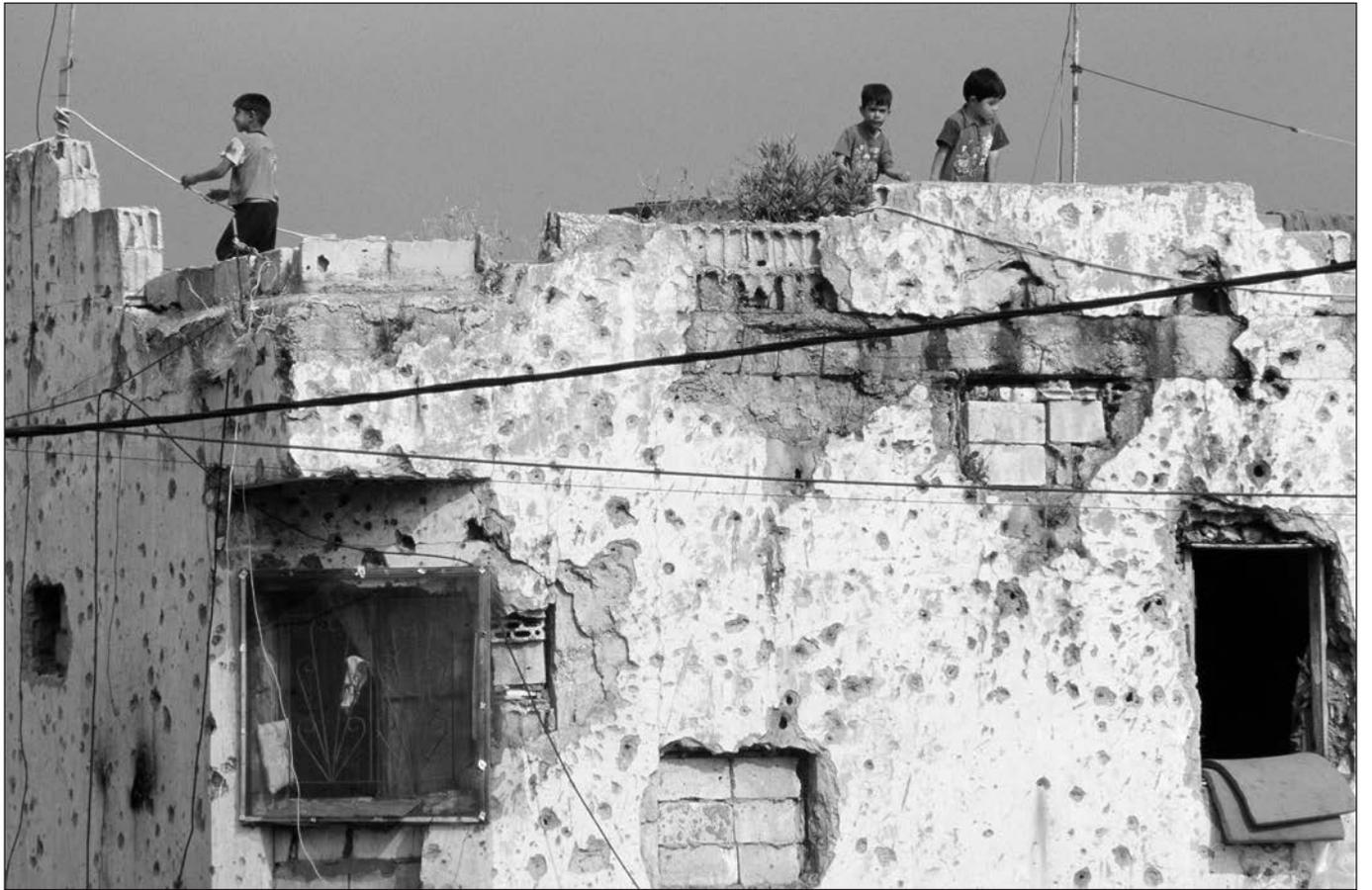


Shatila – 2002 twenty-five years on

In 1977 thousand Palestinians were massacred by Christian militia in the Shatila refugee camp in southern Lebanon. While the killing was carried out by Lebanese Christian militia, an Israeli government enquiry found General Ariel Sharon to be responsible for the massacre. He is Prime Minister of Israel.

These children who were born in the camp, play in buildings riddled with bullet holes, and know no other environment. The psychological environment is one of violence, militant resistance, stress and despair.

Photos: Robert Semeniuk



Shatila 2002

In May this year, twenty years after the Sabra and Shatila massacres, ROBERT SEMENIUK visited the Shatila refugee camp, in Lebanon, and recorded his impressions.

At the entrance to Shatila, the rancid stench from garbage piled up for a city block behind the Syrian-run market stalls, makes me gag and vomit up most of my strong morning coffee. I feel like I am entering a slab of concrete 7 stories high with one alleyway through the middle and a thousand narrower passage ways leading to the lives of some estimated 20,000

disenfranchised, war-hardened, suffering and traumatized people. And where all this “disease” erupts is in the hearts and minds of the children who have consumed 54 years of dedication to the Palestinian cause. I was there when the people of Bedawa and Shatila

marched in memory of the 54 years that they have lived in these hellholes. One man carries a key to his house in Palestine, and I photograph a child who carries a Palestine Mandate land registration certificate as proof of ownership of the land that was taken away from her family, 54 years ago. “We thought we would only be gone for couple of weeks,” one man tells me.

As Nadia Salameh my 50 year-old-guide explains, “the children here are more ‘Palestinian’ than their parents”. The visual evidence comes from a visit to a kindergarten where the teacher, Amira Baytau, is lucky to have a job. If you don’t work for one of the NGO’s in the camp, or the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, you don’t work because Palestinians are not allowed to work (in 72 jobs and professions) in Lebanon.

She is 21, was born in Shatila, and lost her entire family to the war and the massacre in 1982. The children sing songs and hold up a poster they have made. This is one of 5 kindergartens in Shatila, and each one has approximately 100 children. The poster is a painting of the Temple on the Mount in Jerusalem, and on each cloud in the sky is the

name for a child in the class and where their home is in Palestine. These are places they have never seen, places many of their parents have never seen, but which they call home and know all about, and they are only 5 years old. “We will be the flowers of Palestine”, says another

poster on the wall. “We have the right to speak, to play, and be heard”. I ask 5 year-old Abdu Hadi where he comes from and he tells me Abka in the north of Palestine. Another small child tells me she is from Haifa and another says “Rashid”. Not one says, “Shatila”.

At the UN Relief and Works Agency school where class sizes soar to 50 students per class, Amanda, 12, tells me that when she grows up, she wants “to kill Israelis... I want to be a pilot of a war plane... but then there are other pilots that have the right to take their parents on a trips”.

Nadia takes me along the narrow dirty alleyways. It is hot and high noon, the only time the sunshine creeps through the slit at the top of a seven story concrete canyon. Out of the big metal door of the kindergarten, I step into





Left: Palestinian girls in Shatila. Above: Boys on pole in Shatila.

one of the long, narrow, alleyways, all netted together by a web of electric and telephone wires, water pipes and hoses, dripping and hanging and protruding from the graffiti-plastered, often bullet-riddled, suffocating concrete walls.

Water and electricity is patchwork, expensive, more or less illegal, and interrupted on a daily basis. Hezbollah pays for the daily water deliver truck. The confusion of wires speaks loudly for years of re-wiring. And my imagination runs rancid with all the bloody horror that has happened here. The playgrounds are the war-torn buildings. Places of death and memories that never go away. “My grandfather was killed here.” “My mother, my sister, my brother died here.” For every house I visit in Shatila there is another story of death and destruction.

Fatima Mahyoub, was a twenty-year-old mother when the massacre occurred. She remembers an Israeli bomb striking a nearby building. Her husband went outside to see what was happening while she stayed in the house

with her children who were 2 and 3 years old at the time. A few minutes later a woman came to her house. “What are you doing, here?” she said. “They are killing people all around” Fatima pushed her son and daughter through a back window, a very small window. “I don’t know how I did it”, she tells me, “It was so small. She just ran, and found herself lost in the narrow alleys, just following running people trying to get away. There was shooting. She ran to the PRCS Gaza Hospital a few blocks away.

Days later she found her husband who had his own tale of the massacre. “When he went back to the house... The military had occupied it.... They asked him about Palestinian fighters and beat him. He thought he was going to die. He had seen many people dead in the alleys”. Her sister and brother-in-law ran to the Kuwaiti Embassy about 4 blocks away. “The Israeli soldiers were all around the stadium.... my sister saw Ariel Sharon talking to a South Lebanese soldier. During the Israeli bombing my sister lost a leg.... her husband is still an invalid from his wounds”. ■