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The Cruellest of Months

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This section includes a selection of press reports and analyses relevant to the Palestine question that appeared in Arabic sources during the quarter.

- **The Cruellest of Months.** Mahmud Darwish reflects on the passing of twenty months of June.
- **The Choice Is a Palestinian Choice.** Daoud Kuttab examines how the past twenty years have strengthened the Palestinian sense of independence.
- **UNRWA Remembers 1967.** *Al-Fajr* recounts the UNRWA response to the emergencies created by the June war.

The Cruellest of Months

Mahmud Darwish's reflections on the passing of twenty years since the June war appeared under the title " 'Ashruna Huzayran" (Twenty Junes) in al-Yawm al-Sabi', 8 June 1987.

No one is safe from the pain of memories, or from psychological collapse. June is the cruellest of months. June is an abyss which tries to ascend from its own depths to improve the conditions within it. A strained hand is raised to prevent the wall from collapsing and a strained cry rings out: let whatever is collapsing collapse—let our internal pain complete its twentieth year. The passing of twenty years startles us as we ponder what time can and cannot do. Twenty years of pain that we try to forget, but which pursues us. Whoever was born then, in June, is now twenty years old—children familiar with rocks and

small rockets, with prisons, children who have lived abnormal lives. We see to what extent we have been further scattered and to what extent the homeland has narrowed. Twenty seasons of burned wheat.

And as we bid the years farewell, the ideas of youth fade. They would have remained young if night had not been confounded with day. June is the cruellest of months. Because we are witnesses of the event. And turning back to that part of this age which has already ended, this age which defies proper description, does not enable us to escape the fever or to ascertain its origins: is it the past that has taken with it the memory of the defeat and gone away; or is it the present, incapable of separating itself from the spectacle of the defeat and its history so that the past remains capable of repeating itself as long as the reality of the defeat is present in the form of the occupation?

June is the cruellest of months because the occupation is still able to barter, not

only with what it already owns, but with what it is able to take possession of in order to deprive the barterer of the means and ability to barter. And to transform what twenty years ago was a defeat into something which after a short while resembles victory. Time is not on our side. Nor is time their enemy to that extent. Thus we compete with the enemy, not in understanding an historical right in the course of fighting for it, but rather in regret for lost opportunities connected with it. We become moralistic: which side has more experience in lost opportunities? It is a pointless and unequal game. With what available reserves are we playing? Does announcing peace regain the homeland?

Because June is the cruelest of months, we descend a barren valley and ask the question: is what we remember really a memory? Why don't we remember the language again? The language of struggle and the words that it lacks that have come to engender malice, so that we not utter such ironies as: the ruler seated on the throne of personal defeat, the ruler hoisted on the spear of submission, the ruler capable of charging the spirit of the resistance with compromise; the intellectual deprived of the blessing of the linkage of ideas because of continued accommodation to the kind of thought that transforms the idea of liberation into something similar to the prohibition against eating pork; and the street drowned in what the ideology of foolishness substitutes for one's right to daily bread. Old concepts are inappropriate for a question on the dispute between 'Ali and 'A'isha. And so on and so forth, to an irreparable degree, to a degree that ideas become devoid of thought.

June is the cruelest of months. We try to forget because we are deprived of the ability either to discern the moral or to touch the boundaries of our homeland. What is the lesson? They have traversed the distance from the call for a radical

solution intended to destroy the organic defect in the structure and for the downfall of the status quo to the call for a prior and unconditional settlement with the fundamentalists. There is a conspiracy to rob us of the minimum that unites us—an identity which we should not question unless we wish to disappear from the world. Who are we? And who is an Arab? The question, put in a different way and which they translated for us superficially, is: who is a Jew? It is translated for no reason other than to equalize the two dilemmas: the dilemma of the victor incapable of forming an identity and the dilemma of the vanquished who is requested to surrender his identity.

June is the cruelest of months. One is on guard against a culture that strives to transform Arab culture into a fragment condemned to extinction. Here the man of ignorance, who prospers in his fundamentalism and its modern mask, scorns what is shared by the Arabs and indirectly transforms the historical opponent of the Zionist project into a joint enemy of the Zionist project and of the sectarian project united. An attempt is made to deprive the Palestinians of opportunities to apply the slogan "what is taken by force can be regained only by force" and even of the opportunity to participate in the political battle called "the international conference." General Dayan waited many years for an Arab phone to ring in Israel. And the Israeli generals await the ring of another Arab telephone. But they are aware of the power of myths in simplifying reality. As long as the official Arab heroes of June preclude the option of war—in a situation where the options of both peace and no-peace, no-war have collapsed—in such a void, it becomes possible for the Israelis to strip the concept of peace of its elements of freedom and justice, as long as Arab rulers do not fight, do not allow the Palestinian to fight as he wants, and do not permit the Pales-

tinian to represent himself and his problem.

Here a June question arises: if the decision to make war was an *Arab* decision, why should the decision to make peace be based on a *Palestinian* agreement to absent himself? Here the Greek tragedy and the Shakespearian tragedy are completed: the Palestinian is expected to absent himself from his homeland, from his problem, from his case, and from himself. He is requested to appear on stage only once. He who is absent is asked to appear to witness that he is absent, invisible; he is supposed to come only to recognize Israel's existence, Israel which is present only on the condition that the Palestinian is absent. Then the Palestinian is supposed to disappear. He is also supposed to present himself before the Arab ruler to acknowledge that he does not represent himself, to admit that he is absent from the stage in the presence of the one who has requested him to attend once for the sake of permanent absence.

And because June is the cruelest of months the soul returns to it after the spirit of October had almost triumphed over it. Rejectionist impotence or impotent rejection was needed to cross the waterway in order to be transformed into the "force of submission" capable of surpassing psychological barriers and popular resistance.* On the road to the June defeat, there was no need for such sacrifices. The loud applause stopped for the fall of the homeland and for the continuation of the regimes. And the stormy applause stopped for the fall of the imaginary homeland and the birth of hope. For whoever was capable of victory in October had volunteered to protect that which was susceptible to de-

feat in the loss of June. Another element of resistance disintegrates. Another opportunity is lost. Because bidding farewell to the ability to make war means bidding farewell to the ability to make peace.

We must realize again that June did not come from outside as much as it sprang from within. Is June still alive within us? We have witnessed twenty years of occupation. But also twenty years of steadfastness of a people surrounded and besieged by occupation. Twenty years of embers springing from the ashes. Twenty years of the crystallization of the Palestinian national identity. Twenty years of shaping the miracle. Twenty years of resistance that produced the spirit of Beirut which wounded the soul of June and led Israel to an impasse. Are we capable of reflecting on the past in the same way the enemy does in order to exchange or share the meaning of the dilemma?

But this is not the moral. The question is, who is capable of looking forward? In a short time the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Israeli presence on the Palestinians' absence will arrive to find the Israeli myth—"a land without a people for a people without a land"—itself besieged by the contradictory truth. The absent one has returned with all the tools of the present. A homeland that cannot be swallowed up. And a united people who defy extinction. And an idea of youth reproduces its national and Arab identity. The Palestinian is rebuilding his body, his house, and his camp, and he is fighting. He raises an olive branch and a rifle. These are the Arabs capable of fighting in defense of their eastern land. And here is the enemy, torn between looking backward with joy and looking forward with fear. The history of aggression in Palestine is accompanied by a history of the development of resistance.

June may be the cruelest of months, but it is not the final month.

*An allusion to the 1973 crossing of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian army and Sadat's subsequent road to Camp David.