

Samia Bamieh



My mother frequently challenged my fascination for individual heroes, emphasizing that movements and institutions shape the course of history, whereas heroes are merely an inspiration for or embodiment of such movements, never their substitute. She dedicated her life to building such movements and institutions. The fact many readers may not have heard of her is merely testimony to the fact that she has always focused more on her responsibilities than on the credit she might receive for her actions.

Samia found inspiring role models in her own family. Her mother was a descendant of Emir Abdelkader of Algeria, who fought against French colonialism for 18 years before he was imprisoned and exiled. The Emir continued to defend his ideals of freedom and humanism in exile, and in Damascus he used his influence to save the lives of thousands of Christians. Samia's father was a successful businessman who placed his resources and efforts at the service of the Arab Palestinian revolt.

Born a Palestine refugee in Lebanon, Samia discovered Palestine while visiting her father in Gaza and their hometown Yaffa, increasingly comprehending the dispossession her nation endures, living under foreign military-colonial domination. Samia had become increasingly eager to join the Palestinian struggle when she met and married Saeb. They had two children, Rana and me, Majed, and she became a mother the way she was an activist: with all her soul and heart, with responsibility and self-sacrifice. In Beirut, Samia shaped her identity. Then came what she calls her personal Nakba, the 1982 Israeli war in Lebanon. Many more exiles followed, and her choices were dictated by being Palestinian, by marriage, motherhood, and struggle. All her life, Samia had fought hard for her independence – but she was ready to relinquish it in her strive for women's rights, the freedom of her people, and the well-being of her family.

Becoming one of the most intransigent and respected advocates of women's rights in Palestine, Samia held the movement's highest positions. She was chairwoman of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC, a coalition of women's movements within Palestinian factions); an elected member in the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW); founder and president of the GUPW branch in the United

Arab Emirates; chairperson of the Palestinian steering committee of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC); and a key actor in the establishment of the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs. And yet, she is most proud of her role as a community organizer among the women of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon, where she worked before the massacre. She frequently weeps whenever these names are mentioned.

Samia also held prominent positions at the national and international levels, serving as ambassador, head of the UN and Europe departments at the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and member of the first committee mandated with the drafting of the Palestinian constitution. She defended the Palestinian cause and mobilized internationally against the occupation and for Palestinian rights, always refusing diktats and empty dialogue not based on shared values and joint struggle.

For Samia, there can be no separation between the fight for women's rights and national rights, freedom is non-negotiable, diversity is God's design and an essential part of Palestine's identity, and pluralism is synonym to shared dignity and democracy. She defends ideals, not ideologies, and plays tough to defend her principles, sometimes at the expense of her true nature and sensitivity. Her detailed-oriented mind and sharp, uncompromising analysis have allowed Samia to create a unique vision and articulate positions with courage and clarity. Her frankness, even bluntness, and passion, even anger, stem from a permanent rebellion against injustice. She not only speaks truth to power, she acts accordingly. Thus, she resisted when donors demanded from WATC to renege on

figures of the Palestinian revolution, when the town Burqa decided to name after Dalal Moghrabi a center that WATC had helped establish. She was disappointed to see her European partners fall into the Israeli trap that aims to divert attention away from its own crimes by calling on Palestinians to denounce their icons from a different era of the struggle - something no liberation movement or nation can comply with, and something Israel was never required to do. Samia felt compelled to remind these partners that despite a common commitment to shared values and international law, Europeans refuse to impose sanctions on Israel for its crimes, while they sanction Palestinian organizations over the historical narratives they revere despite these organizations' outstanding record in defending human rights.

My mom spent the last two months in intensive care, fighting for life. Whereas she has always been vocal in the struggle for others, she remained silent about her own pain. In Palestine and internationally, her values are under attack, and I sensed that she wanted to get back onto her feet and fight. She asserted that even warriors have the right to rest, but resting is something she has never done. She told me in a whisper, "My story is part of a greater story of women's movements across history, of the liberation movement of Palestine and as such of the greater history of resisting oppression everywhere. I am one of the proud heirs of these struggles, and I hope we have transmitted these values and the determination to defend them to ensure that freedom and justice – and consequently peace – shall triumph in Palestine and all over the globe." Many of us are trying, to the extent possible, to walk in her giant footsteps. And we call upon her to continue leading the way from heaven.