

Letter to an Israeli soldier

By Zeinab Charafeddine*

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Dear soldier,

I saw your pretty face, while your comrade was preparing you for fighting by painting your face with the soil of my country, the soil that held firm the trees before your bulldozers tore them out.

You are no more than 21 years old! What have you seen of life? What have you lived through? What did you read, before they pushed in front of your pretty face this killing machine? What did they whisper in your innocent ears, and what did they promise you? This child now handicapped, what she do to you? Did she harm your child, or occupy by force her bedroom?

Oh soldier, we live in the same neighbourhood. Did you notice that the earth of my country and that which you inhabit are so similar, that the olives and orange trees growing in them are alike? That the wild flowers are the same on both sides of the border? That the sea is the same colour from Tyre to Haifa?

Oh soldier living in the neighborhood, why have you never thought of coming without your killing machine and without your suit of war? Why could you not advance two kilometers to see how this small Lebanese girl is similar to your small sister, and how much her brother looks like the brother of your beloved one, to see how children look like other children, how they play the same games, how they cry if they fall down, how they scream when frightened, and how they all like to sleep in the arms of their mothers.

Have you ever thought of taking two steps forward to see how they work hard from dawn to sunset, summer, winter, spring and autumn, while they plough the soil, plant and water crops, and look forward to the harvest.

Oh soldier, if you come during the harvest, without your 'Markava' [tank], these peasants will offer you freshly picked apples. If you arrive in the morning, you will smell the 'saj' bread [flat bread cooked on open fire] made from our golden wheat. If you come in the morning without your killing suit, you will be offered "mana' ouch" with thyme [another kind of Lebanese bread] and milk fresh from the cow.

Oh Soldier, have you no date today, with your beloved one? What made you change your mind and let her down? Your loved one, meanwhile, is preparing herself to see you, putting the *Kohol* on her eyes, and massaging her body with perfumed creams.

How would she receive you, if you return? When you smell of the blood of children? What will you say if your smell alarms her?

Would your beloved sleep ever again next to you? If she would, soldier, for she loves you, for she pardons you, how would you ever sleep, when this smell sticks to you?

Soldier, it is harvest time. Take off your fighting suit. Give them back the gun they have pushed in front of your pretty face. Come in peace, for breakfast. And then go back to your date with your beloved.

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