



War Never Leaves Me... Nor Do the Memories

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In southern Lebanon, displacement was never just a forced geographical move. It was a deep psychological uprooting that altered the destiny of thousands. War was not a passing episode in time, but a radical turning point in the lives of people who lost their homes, their loved ones, and their sense of safety.

Much has been written about the political and military dimensions of war, but the human and psychological pain often remains sidelined—even though it is the most enduring and transformative for survivors.

Among those most deeply affected were women, forced into cramped, temporary shelters without privacy. Their scars were not visible to the eye, but they still ache to this day.

The stories of Zeinab, a woman displaced from the South, and Brigitte, who lived through the Lebanese Civil War in Beirut, remind us that pain does not recognize time, and trauma knows no borders.

Uprooted Lives in the South

During years of security unrest and repeated assaults, southern Lebanon witnessed harsh waves of displacement. Villages once filled with life suddenly turned into danger zones. Families fled under shelling and panic.

These were not distant images on a television screen—they were burned homes, shuttered schools, abandoned fields, and families crammed into school halls, relatives' houses, or, at times, the streets.

Displacement carried multiple losses: material, social, and emotional. The most vulnerable—women, children, and the elderly—were hit the hardest. Women, in particular, found themselves carrying the burden of survival under unbearable conditions, even as they longed for someone to carry them.

Zeinab's Story

Now in her late thirties, Zeinab still remembers the day her life changed forever. In her early twenties then, she was preparing





for her wedding and dreaming of finishing her nursing studies in Aitaroun. When I met her, she recalled with tears streaming down her cheeks:

“I never imagined I’d have to leave everything in a single moment. I left behind my home, my dreams, my fiancé. Even my photographs—I couldn’t take them with me.”

As the shells rained down, Zeinab and her family fled to Beirut, finding refuge in a school-turned-shelter. The floor was their bed, the walls had no doors, and the nights were long and stripped of safety.

“I slept afraid, woke up afraid, lived inside a body that never knew rest.”

The deepest wound came when she learned her fiancé had been killed: “It was as if I died three times. The first when I felt fear, the second when I fled, the third when the man I loved was gone.”

Zeinab described her collapse as a slow drowning. No one truly listened. Whenever she tried to speak, she was met with words like: “Be strong, this isn’t the end of the world.” But for her, it was the end of her world.

Her trauma was not a fleeting sadness but a lasting psychological rupture. She lives in

a state of constant alert, haunted by the fear of loss, always bracing for the next disaster. The sound of planes sends her spiraling back into memories of shelling and escape. Crowded places suffocate her. She lost her appetite, her energy, her desire to connect with others. Trust, once given freely, now feels impossible.

“I didn’t even know what was happening to me. I was just exhausted... drained... crying for no reason.”

Without psychological support, her suffering deepened. No one asked, “How do you feel?” The focus was only on survival of the body, while the soul was forgotten.

Over time, Zeinab began showing clear symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): recurring nightmares, flashbacks of planes, smoke, and her fiancé’s screams. Words themselves became painful—she avoided talking about the past, often feeling detached from reality, as if her body was in one place and her soul in another. Even small triggers—a light going out, a sudden loud noise—were enough to spark terror. Her relationships with loved ones frayed; she felt “walled in by something invisible,” unheard and unseen.

The weight of it all eventually grew into deep depression: loss of





interest in life, relentless insomnia, and emotional exhaustion.

Brigitte's Story

Decades earlier, during the Lebanese Civil War, Brigitte from Beirut's Ashrafieh neighborhood lived through her own devastating loss. She still recounts it as if it were yesterday:



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"I was preparing food for my son, George... then an explosion. When I entered the room, everything was burned. Nothing was left of my son but his name."

Even thirty years later, Brigitte screams when she hears a child running.

"I call out without knowing: George! George! As if I'm searching for him in every face."

Her symptoms mirror Zeinab's: relentless nightmares, sudden panic attacks where her voice breaks and her chest tightens as though trapped on all sides. She lives with a constant urge to run, without knowing where. She fears loving again, convinced her heart could not endure another loss. She lost trust in her community, no longer seeing it as protection but as a reminder of

her wound.

Her deepest pain was survivor's guilt: "I lived, but I didn't know how to go on living without him. My survival felt like betrayal."

Like Zeinab, Brigitte found little understanding. Society turned away. Social expectations were harsh: "They told me life goes on. But no one told me how I was supposed to go on."

From Silence to Voice

And yet, Zeinab refused to remain a victim. After months of despair, she returned to her nursing studies: "I wanted to understand my body, to understand my pain, and to help other women."

She joined psychological support workshops and began participating in community initiatives for women





affected by war. The silence that once crushed her became a voice defending the right to healing.

Like Zeinab, many women transformed grief into resilience—through education, work, and telling their stories.

The Unfinished War Within

Displacement is not measured by the kilometers we are forced to leave behind, but by the distance it creates between us and our sense of safety, identity, and self.

War does not end when the fighting stops. It lingers—in insomnia, in shattered dreams, in long silences.

Only acknowledgment of pain, and the creation of safe spaces for expression and healing, can restore balance.

The stories of Zeinab and Brigitte testify that women carry not only the memory of survival but also the potential for resilience and transformation.

Through their voices, we preserve a memory that must not be forgotten and open the door to collective healing. Because surviving in the body alone is not true survival—unless the soul is also healed.

