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Palestine: From the Rubble, Life

Eman Mohammed



TWO WOMEN OF THE KHADERI FAMILY PEER FROM THE WINDOW OF THE TENT WHERE THEY MOVED THEIR FAMILIES, FEARING THE COLLAPSE OF THEIR CRUMBLING HOME

GAZA, Palestinian Territories—Between the shattered memories of the past and an unknown future lies a pile of rubble that is called home. Mohammed Khaderi, his wife Ebtesam and the 22 members of their family live here, in the heart of Gaza. Their house was targeted by Israeli field operations and all but leveled during the last incursion into the Gaza Strip—the 2008-2009 war. Ever since, the Khaderi family has lived

beneath a makeshift tent attached to what remains.

Until mid-2007, Mohammed and his brother worked in Israel as laborers, but both lost their jobs after the frontier between the two states closed in June 2007, after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip and Israel tightened its blockade. In December 2008, Israel embarked on a series of air attacks against targets in Gaza where, it

said, Hamas was launching rocket attacks at Israeli cities. This was followed by a ground assault and, though the Khaderi home was not targeted, everything in the neighborhood was leveled.

After the houses were gone and the dust cleared, the Khaderis realized that there were no tents available, no supplies to rebuild. Winter had set in and they huddled around a fire to keep warm, occasionally cooking food that arrived from the few aid organizations that remained. In the first weeks after the war, there were no public facilities, no running water or sanitation and no schools. Children wandered idly through the wasteland. Today, the Khaderis are entirely reliant upon aid for their survival. As Mohammed says, "This is not a way of life, we don't know if we will get anything tomorrow or not. Until now we considered ourselves lucky."

The Khaderis rarely venture into what is left of their two-story home—they are too afraid that what little remains of the concrete structure might collapse. The Israeli blockade of Gaza continues, and they cannot attain the concrete necessary to rebuild (as

this issue went to press, there were rumblings of allowing building materials through). For Mohammed and his brother, this also means no employment. To resume work in Gaza, the factories must also be rebuilt. Their plight is not much different from hundreds of other families in Gaza who became homeless after the war.

At the end of Ramadan, outside what was once the entrance to their home, the Khaderis gather on a large blanket and carpets scavenged from the rubble. They break the fast. On the fringe hover several pigeons that Mohammed has raised through the years. It is perhaps the most remarkable and distinguishing mark of the Khaderi family—the long relationship they have had with their pigeons. It is also the one constant through the violence of the war and the bitterness of the aftermath, Mohammed's confidence that despite the misery, suffering and death surrounding them, no matter where he and his children might go, the pigeons will follow. When nothing else is left, there is this comfort. ●



RAMADAN IS OVER, AND THE 22 MEMBERS OF THE KHADERI FAMILY GATHER IN FRONT OF WHAT REMAINS OF THEIR HOME TO BREAK THE FAST.

EBTESAM KHADERI, HOLDING FARAH, THE YOUNGEST OF HER SEVEN DAUGHTERS. AT LEFT: THE BACK WALL OF THE TENT WHERE THE FAMILY NOW LIVES





THE COMMUNITY OF EZBT ABED RABO, IN NORTHERN GAZA, WHERE THE KHADERI FAMILY LIVES. BELIEVED TO BE THE SOURCE OF MANY OF THE 3,000 ROCKETS AND MORTARS THAT FELL ON ISRAEL, IT WAS LEVELED DURING THE 2008-2009 WAR.

BOYS FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD WALK TO RUNNING WATER TO BATHE. A YEAR AFTER THE INVASION, EZBT ABED RABO IS A RUBBLE STREWN MOONSCAPE STRETCHING AS FAR AS THE FRONTIER.





MOHAMMED KHADERI STOOPS TO LIGHT A FIRE TO BOIL WATER FOR TEA, PREPARING FOR THE END OF RAMADAN. HIS HOUSE HAS NO ELECTRICITY OR RUNNING WATER SINCE THE INVASION ENDED LAST YEAR.

THE KHADERI ELDERS PREPARE FOR THE MEAL THAT MARKS THE END OF RAMADAN.





THE KHADERI'S NEIGHBORS, DRYING LAUNDRY FROM THE REMAINS OF THEIR HOME—SCATTERED CONCRETE PILLARS ON A DIRT FIELD.

BATH TIME FOR MAHMUD KHADERI, 8. THE FAMILY'S TUB WAS DRAGGED FROM THE HOUSE.





ANOTHER KHADERI NEIGHBOR SQUATS BY WHAT REMAINS OF HER HOME IN
EZBT ABED RABO, NORTHERN GAZA.

MOHAMMED KHADERI FEEDS PIGEONS WITH HIS DAUGHTER, MONA, AGE 4.





PALESTINIAN CHILDREN RAISE THEIR NATION'S TATTERED FLAG
IN EZBT ABED RABO, NORTHERN GAZA.

MEN OF EZBT ABED RABO GATHER JUST AFTER SUNSET FOR THE
MAGHRIB PRAYER, THE FOURTH OF FIVE PRAYERS PERFORMED
DAILY BY DEVOUT MUSLIMS.

