

# Women And War

## To Faten

Omar Sabbagh

A year or two past the 2006 war.  
At an American College  
The scene sets itself:

A conference room seems to hold  
A quiver of youngish graduates,  
Arrowed for the day's  
Splendid talk, splendid foray.

Here we've a keynote speaker,  
American like the space,  
And visiting Lebanon  
For the first time, face to face.

Her brief: Women and War –  
The stories her penning, famished mind  
Might gather, seas of fraught, taut  
Narrative, plus, of course,  
The apposite brine.

Our keynote speaker here  
Wants to hear the woman's tale  
Grow larger, how women fit their fate  
In times of manly war.

Some of the girls attending  
Are veiled, some are not.  
Some wend down  
From families like liberal, opened knots,  
And some

Descend more slowly downwards

From your more traditional lot.

The first to speak to the visiting lady,  
The first to speak from woe,  
Was a girl who'd worked a small while for  
The red of the Red Cross, helping  
Throughout that horrid space  
Of wounds, the agonizing loss,

Heart-colored  
And good succor for the lost.

She spoke  
Of the unity of the Lebanese  
And how all and all chipped-in  
As one deep pocket, holding  
A vagary of coins and a vagary of sins.

She spoke of the heartfelt  
Soldering  
In time of war, and how  
Nothing proved the lay

As lie-less as the way

The people joined as one, when  
The solid rock  
Of solidarity  
Was dearly needed

And once again: begun.

It was a rosy tale  
To which one deep girl, veiled  
And speaking next,  
Chose to object.

At that time, in that liberal space,  
The next veiled girl spoke with avid grace  
Of her background  
Which was written on her opened face.

She lived in Dahieh, the most-bombed-out  
place,  
A hotbed for the tongues of war,  
For the lava and for all its hate,

And she begged to disagree  
To her peer's rosy tale  
Of somewhat rosy pedigree.

Speaking-up, she told the visiting  
American lady  
That Lebanon  
Was rarely, rarely one.

That it was always, always split, riven  
By the graveyards of the cynics,  
Where opportunity proves a wake

For any large and rosy sense  
Of hale-blooded oneness  
Or the unity  
Of one sole fate.

After regaling about the root  
Of her well-worn veil, a family's route,  
She supposed, quite traditional,

She began, with irate fire,  
To denigrate  
The Party of God  
At the vital, beating center  
Of that horrid war. And it was strange  
To hear such a glaring gloss  
From one such as this:

She claimed to speak of facts,  
The cists that others missed,  
The pins that pierced the heart  
Of their clueless fancy –

The duped, the duping foolery  
Of their so-called, imagined  
Community.

She railed against Hezbollah  
For one main reason:

That while they claimed to be  
Fighting for a nation  
A nation's war, they were fighting  
Their own, and that alone.

While the whole nation felt  
The vicious bite of the Zionist state  
The war in truth was the acid-child  
Of one group's steady, visceral hate.

She gave facts to back her case:  
The cynicism  
Of strong, of high-strung parties,  
Proving in the actual, frail.

For instance,  
 How a certain murderous chief  
 Back in the year of 1990, a man  
 Who'd led the slaughter  
 At Sabra and Shatila,  
 A Christian faction's leader,  
 A monstrous man, once set and phased  
 In the mold of the dark-lit pay  
 Of one of Israel's greatest monsters –  
 How such a one was granted aid  
 To turn a new and leafy page,  
 To turn due and valid once again –  
 A new-found politician  
 In post-war Lebanon –  
 And helped by that very party  
 Of God's good way  
 And those who hated most of all  
 The monstrous part  
 Of your staple, Israeli  
 State. It was merely  
 An example,  
 She seemed to say,  
 Grippled to spread her view  
 That the war of 2006 was nothing,  
 Was in truth nothing, nothing new:  
 That there was nothing rosy-tinted  
 About Lebanon, from the many  
 To the few.

Meanwhile, another veiled girl,  
 Seated close-by, whose uncle  
 Was smashed and cut and killed by  
 A missile, some mad Zionist's thrill,  
 Wept and wept, unceasingly.  
 She wished to offer the opposite view,  
 But her tears prevailed, a veil beneath the veil,  
 A covering of the eyes and lips  
 With the salt of the earth, with tears  
 About the reigning fact, for some,  
 Of the vast opposite of birth.  
 The conference hall turned to a fracas.  
 Frank Sorries between the girls were later  
 Solicited. And while  
 The American visitor, a writer for all her troubles,  
 Must have gained a good, grim taste  
 Of the realities  
 Between a rock and a far harder place –  
 The hoopla and the angles  
 Of all that viscid brouhaha  
 Meant the recordings on the tapes  
 Of this one sad conference  
 On women and their war,  
 Ended up  
 In some dust-colored grate,  
 Fired and flamed away,  
 To be seen, or heard, no more.