

Title: My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle.

Publisher: Pluto Press

Year: 2010

ISBN: 978-0745328836

Pages: 320

RRP: £19.99

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Review:

This is the story of Shafiq Al-Hout, a senior member of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. It is a story that provides critical lessons about what should be circumvented in politics, the dangers of complacency, and the reality of Palestine's political situation. His perspective represents the views of a segment of Arab society that have been privileged to receive a Western style education and as a result have been instilled with secular political notions. These views influenced the core of the decision making processes in the PLO and Hout provides an in depth commentary on the ideologies and internal politics which influenced the PLO's actions.

Hout's account of the Palestinian experience, in the past fifty years, is a perspective deeply entrenched in Arab nationalism and secular politics. The reader is given an account of the zeitgeist which has dominated the Arab world for over half a century. Hout's account can be read on two levels; on one level there is the political conflict experienced by Palestinians in neighbouring countries, and on another level there is a deeper undercurrent which questions the effectiveness of a secular political system; as a solution to the conflict.

The narrative provides scrutiny of Arab Leadership including acute analysis in which he describes incompetent Arab leadership in general. The PLO as an organisation was no exception, as there existed 'no fixed strategy or any political agenda compromising a list of priorities, mechanisms or tactics'. Despite Hout's idealistic devotion to Arab nationalism, this account shows an individual who was challenging those thought processes and assumptions. At times Hout uses a caustic tongue to analyse the Arab leadership and he does so with an untarnished veracity. The insight stems from his many diplomatic missions.

The bulk of the book describes a catalogue of diplomatic visits pursued in the hope of a pan-Arab alliance which Hout believed could form the basis for the liberation of Palestine. During critical times the dream of a great Arab alliance was sought with even more ferocity when economic and political turmoil was experienced in the Arab world, after the creation of Israel. The dream of Arab nationalism was pegged on the memory of an illustrious past.

In reality, Arab nationalism appears to be a limiting factor in the PLO movement. After a few pages it becomes apparent that the Arab leaders and their practical help to Palestinians were as feeble as the rhetoric of Arab nationalism was profound. The chapters titled, 'The Sabra and Shatila massacre' and 'The second exodus from Lebanon' provides harrowing accounts of the conflicts between Arabs, and the appalling treatment of Palestinian refugees in neighbouring countries. The account of the Sabra and Shatila massacre demonstrates how the PLO's policies and ideals failed to empower the Palestinian people. Sabra and Shatila rendered the hopes of unity on nationalistic grounds a mere 'illusion of a phony national identity' (180).

Arab nationalism, by its very nature, was destined to surrender under the pressure of domestic objectives of host countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. The PLO's request for help on the grounds of nationalism appeared to be flawed from the start. It would be in the interests of the surrounding neighbouring countries to protect their own national interests which were always, as one would expect, above the needs of Palestinian refugees.

Constancy was never a defining feature of the PLO. The bulk of the book consists of the delegations and numerous conferences which Hout attended. In the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war, the policies became 'cheap carbon copies of their predecessors' (180). The repetitive conferences and delegations represent a period of Hout's life which was clearly occupied with quelling the flames of the Palestinian dispossession. This resulted in a highly myopic political agenda; although there was armed resistance in the PLO, the ideological basis was underdeveloped. The PLO is presented as an organic institution that evolved with the volatile political situation in the Arab world; it was inevitable that the organisation would grow to accommodate the political paradoxes which have hindered the Palestinian struggle

The central tension in the PLO can be traced to the conflicting values in the organisation's purpose. Was it ever possible for the PLO to implement the responsibilities of a state, without the full rights of a state? The question was only answered in retrospect, once the people of Palestine took matters in their own hands, during the first intifada. The intifada in the 1980's highlighted what the PLO had failed to do. There was a return to the notion that, 'the war starts in Palestine and the Peace starts in Palestine' (130).

Since the intifada there has been a bifurcation between the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people. Hout expresses his anguish at how the PLO and many other Palestinian secular organisations were sucked in to the delaying tactics of the Israeli government. They then surfaced even more divided and fractured than before they had entered such 'negotiations'. Hout's resignation after the Oslo agreement provided him with a moral immunity against such embarrassing and shameful ends that other members of the Palestinian leadership have incurred.

When reading this book an inverse relationship becomes apparent; as he travels further away from the PLO we are given a more critical commentary on its shortcomings as an organisation. After his resignation from the PLO, the narrative develops a sombre and reflective tone which reflects his religious beliefs at times. The combined factors of his illness and his departure from a secular political environment resulted in a difficult period of self-analysis. There is the fleeting mention of a number of sub-groups which formed from the failure of the Oslo agreement; Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

Hout's journey can be seen as microcosm of political thought in the Middle East, from its disastrous experiment with communism, participation in the UN, and dead end talks with Israel. The secular doctrines which have ultimately led to a path of compromise and loss are contrasted, in the last pages, with Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. As the final pages in this narrative show the turning of a new chapter; a chapter that is far beyond the scope of nationalism and politics.

Book Description: This is the inside story of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), from its beginnings in 1964 to the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993. For over three decades, the main goal of the PLO was to achieve a just peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to build a democratic state in Palestine for all its citizens. The years between the September 1970 war in Jordan and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon were critical ones for the PLO. The armed struggle as the means to achieve that aim. Both those movements declared their rejection of a compromise and the programs associated with compromise, including the Declaration of Independence which the Palestine National Council of the PLO Save. Product Identifiers. Publisher. Pluto Press. ISBN-10. 0745328830. ISBN-13. 9780745328836. eBay Product ID (ePID). Jaffa, My City 2. From Homeland to Exile 3. From Journalism to Politics 4. The Birth of the Palestine Liberation Organisation 5. The Factions Gain Control over the PLO 6. Jordanian-Palestinian Relations 7. Nasser As I Knew Him 8. Fratricidal Wars 9. The PLO at the United Nations 10. Palestine, Around the Globe 11. The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon 12. The Sabra and Shatila Massacre 13. After the Departure 14. Pluto- this was the cat's name-was my favourite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he followed me everywhere about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him following me through the streets. Our friendship lasted for several years, during which my character (I blush to confess it) had changed for the worse. I became day by day more moody and irritable. It often happened that I hurt the feelings of others; I suffered myself as I was rude to my wife. At last I even hit her. My pets, of course, could feel the change in my character. In fact, I began to treat them cruelly The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle. By: Shafiq Al-Hout. Publisher: Pluto Press. Print ISBN: 9780745328836, 0745328830. Print ISBN: 9780745328836, 0745328830. eText ISBN: 9781783714223, 1783714220. eText ISBN: 9781783714223, 1783714220. More than 15 million users have used our Bookshelf platform over the past year to improve their learning experience and outcomes. With anytime, anywhere access and built-in tools like highlighters, flashcards, and study groups, it's easy to see why so many students are going digital with Bookshelf. Over a million. titles available from more than 1,000 publishers. Over 40,000. customer reviews with an average rating of 9.5. Over 3 billion. digital pages viewed over the past 12 months. Over 7,000.