

The Missing

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They say that the missing are neither dead nor alive. They must be floating in a middle world, waiting for their fate to be unveiled. I was 7 in 1981 when my father was detained in Beirut. Three days later he was set free. Years later, I understood he had been luckier than many others.

There is an estimated 17,000 missing and victims of enforced disappearance whose families still await their return. They all disappeared during Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war. They were from diverse religions, gender, age and political persuasions and were kidnapped by different Lebanese militias that took part in the war, as well as Syria and Israel.

Since 2010, I have been telling the stories of the families of the missing and photographing their ongoing struggle.

Mohammad Abbas

Zahra Abbas sits on her bed at her apartment in Tyre, south of Lebanon. Zahra's husband Mohammad went missing in 1978 as he was on his way to Lebanon from Saudi Arabia after finishing his work contract there. Mohammad who drove his car with 2 other colleagues, crossed the Saudi Jordanian border, the Jordanian Syrian border and then the Syrian Lebanese one but never made it back home to his family in Tyre. He was 32. In December 2015, a month after photographing her Zahra passed away without knowing the fate of her husband! She raised her 4 daughters alone and spent her life looking for him. She was 25 when he disappeared.

Georges Ghawi

A photo torn in half, taken in the mid 1960s, showing Marie Ghawi and her son Georges holding a big candle on Palm Sunday, lies on one of the two beds in the one-bedroom apartment where Marie lives alone.

Georges was 22 years old when he was kidnapped while on a business trip in West Beirut, on December 30, 1983. He had planned to elope with his fiancée the following day.

Years after his kidnapping, Marie tore most of the photographs of Georges to remove relatives and friends. The only photos she kept intact were those Georges took during his trip to Hong Kong few months before his kidnapping.

Marie looked for her son everywhere, but she has never found him. She is still struggling to know his fate.

Kariman Mohammad

A fur coat belonging to Kariman Mohammad Ahmad hangs on a wardrobe inside her daughter Rasha Jomaa's bedroom in Saida, South Lebanon. Kariman left her husband and two children at home in Saida one day in 1986, and headed to her parents' in Beirut.

Not being in touch, her husband and parents only realized a couple of months later that Kariman never reached Beirut that day and that she was in fact missing.

Rasha was only 5 years old at the time. Over the past few years, she started investigating her mother's disappearance.

Qozhayya Shahwan

Nahil sits in the garden of the house where her husband, Qozhayya Shahwan, was born and brought up, and where she later moved in after their marriage and had their four children, in Batroun, North Lebanon, Qozhayya was 28 years old when, in 1980, militants took him from work for investigation. He never came back home since that day.

Nahil, who was 25 at the time, had to work to bring up their children, send them to school, and support her in-laws, with whom she lived for 25 years after her husband's kidnapping. She looked for him everywhere; she went from one detention center to another until she finally saw him several months later for few minutes in a Syrian prison. Since then, his fate has been unknown.

Rashid Liddawi

Imm Rashid watches TV in her house in Tripoli, North Lebanon. Above her hangs a photo of Rashid who went out on April 10, 1976 to buy cigarettes and never came back. He was 15 years old. His mother looked for him all around the country but never got information about his whereabouts... Imm Rashid says that her heart tells her he is still alive.

Many of the missing and victims of enforced disappearance were under 18 at the time of their abduction.

Wajih Zahalan

A shoe lies in an abandoned building that was used as a detention center during the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war in Bhamdoun, east of Beirut. In 1982, a pile of passports belonging to people who were kidnapped was found inside the building, among them, the passport of Wajih Zahalan, a month after his kidnapping.

Wajih left his home in Aley one early morning in winter, and headed to the Bekaa with his business partner for work. That morning, Wajih left without waking his four children-he never said goodbye. A couple of days later, a friend of the family learned that they were both stopped on the road and taken away by force. He was 38 years old.

When they found his passport, it was missing his photo, but information about his identity was still there.

Wajih's son Ayman entered the building in 2014 for the first time since the kidnapping of his father. He started looking for writings on the wall, hoping to find a message from his father. But he found nothing.

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