

# ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN



Leather  
Social



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDAMA

'An artist uses lies to reveal the truth.  
A politician uses lies to mask the truth'  
George Orwell

Fida, travelling on the underground the morning of 7th July 2005, is caught up in the London bombings. As she struggles between life and death a voice urges her toward life. Scarred from her injuries and with no clear sense why she is drawn to Palestine, she sets out on a journey to the West Bank. During her attempt to come to terms with her psychological pain Fida's flashbacks mirror the ongoing trauma suffered by Palestinians. Her deepening relationship with a Palestinian family provides her with a stable environment to make new discoveries that lead her to meaningful insights and to a profound spiritual connection with the father she has never known. As she journeys with her Palestinian friends through shared losses and celebrations she comes to appreciate and incorporate for herself, the tremendous steadfastness and resilience of a nation in the face of ongoing military occupation.

This is not only a novel about tragedy, discovery and love; it is also a story that delves into the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Moving between England, the West Bank and Gaza the unfolding events, while fictional, reveal an authentic reality that is based on actual events.



To  
Dr. Tan Mahathir Mohamad  
It is such a privilege to  
meet you.

ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

Wishing you and your  
family great happiness  
Warmest wishes

Heath Shy

9th Oct 2015



TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

# ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN



Heather Stroud

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1011240

TOP

The Other Press  
Kuala Lumpur

UN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

# ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN



Heather Stroud

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1011240

TOP

The Other Press  
Kuala Lumpur

© Heather Stroud 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be produced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

*Published by*

The Other Press Sdn. Bhd.

607 Mutiara Majestic

Jalan Othman

46000 Petaling Jaya

Selangor, Malaysia

*www.ibtbooks.com*

The Other Press is affiliated with Islamic Book Trust.

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Stroud, Heather

Abraham's children / by Heather Stroud.

Includes index

ISBN 978-983-9541-82-3

1. English fiction. I. Title.

823

Cover design by Tristan Stroud.

Cover image: Graffiti taken from the West Bank Wall.

*Printed by*

Angkatan Edaran Enterprise Sdn. Bhd.

Lot 6, Jalan Tukang 16/4

Seksyen 16

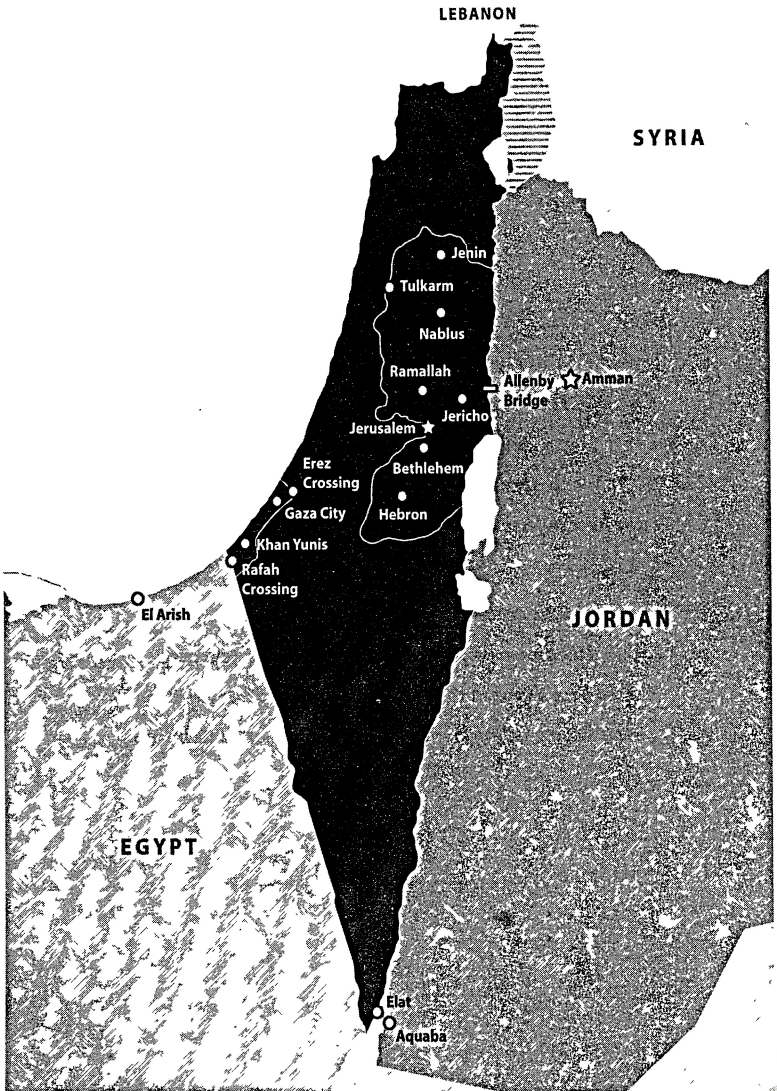
40000 Shah Alam, Selangor

823  
STR

*I dedicate this novel to the memory of Rakan  
and to all the children of Palestine;  
be they still young, now old, living or dead  
who have suffered during this conflict of the past sixty plus years.*

*I also dedicate this novel to the samud (steadfastness) of the  
Palestinian people and to the thousands of activists  
who have shared in the struggle for a just and free Palestine,  
some having willingly risked their health or forfeit their lives.*





## Special acknowledgements to the Vietnamese FangCheng community and to Palestinian friends in West Bank and Gaza

I could not have written this without the initial support of the Vietnamese FangCheng Community. It was the privilege of hearing their story and writing it as my first novel, 'The Ghost Locust', that gave me the confidence to research and write this story. It was also from them that I received the financial backing to make the trips to Palestine and engage in 'non violent' activism.

The FangCheng people represent a group of North Vietnamese, caught up in the Chinese/Vietnamese border war of 1978, who escaped on small boats in an attempt to claim asylum in Hong Kong. The sea journey around Hainan Island is extremely treacherous and many boats sank. Those who survived their sinking vessels were arrested by Chinese border guards and initially placed in a former prison camp in the Chinese province of DongHung. They were later moved to a camp in FangCheng. Some of those seeking asylum were forced to spy and pushed back over the border into VietNam only to be arrested by Vietnamese border guards. Others escaped the camp in China and successfully made it to Hong Kong. This is where I became

acquainted with them and my journey of documenting their cases for asylum began.

Although the Palestinians' story of oppression and displacement is different from that experienced by the Vietnamese there are many parallels. Both the Vietnamese and Palestinian people have endured long years of occupation. Both have experienced war and both have experienced the flight of a large number of their population seeking asylum and enduring the misery and peril that such flight entails. Both share a tremendous sense of resilience and a humour and generosity of spirit that is born out of suffering. VietNam is no longer occupied or at war and has made massive progress in both economics and political reform. The conflict perpetrated on the Palestinian people, on the other hand, is desperate. Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur has described the situation in Gaza as delayed genocidal catastrophe. With shortages of clean water, food, medicines, and building supplies the Gazans barely have enough to survive even at the most basic level. Gaza has been described as both a prison camp and laboratory where new US and Israeli weapons can be tested on the Gazan people. The situation of apartheid in the West Bank is barely better. With increasing settlement expansion, settler only roads and over six hundred checkpoints and road blocks the economy is crushed and people locked in poverty and humiliation. Defence for Children International (Palestine) laboriously document the growing number of children who are routinely arrested (often during the early hours of

## *Special Acknowledgements*

the morning) and subjected to physical and psychological torture techniques by Israeli soldiers and interrogators. One such documented story is that of Rakan, a twelve year old boy who was arrested, detained under Israeli military law and after release chose to end his life by taking a cigarette lighter to a checkpoint and pointing it at soldiers who shot him through the head.

I am indebted to the generosity of the Vietnamese FangCheng community and the generosity of the Palestinians who opened their hearts and their homes to me. This novel is testament to their struggle and to the courage of all people who stand in solidarity and refuse to remain silent while these crimes are perpetuated, not only by Israel but by those who financially support and collude in this shameful episode of humankind.





PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDAMA

## Personal acknowledgements

Anyone who has published a novel will know that, while the writing of it might take place in isolation, the research and the support required to actually get the manuscript into print invariably requires a team of good people. Certainly for me this has been the case. I want to thank Amjad for his support when I first travelled to Occupied Palestine. It was he who advised me on the journey and connected me with the Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development. This is a group of wonderful women who enabled me to glimpse how it is to live under a military occupation. I am eternally grateful for their support, friendship and the hospitality generously provided by them and their families. When I was finding it hard to isolate myself in the dark room where my old computer sits it was LanAnh and family who provided me with a laptop. What a treasured gift. I have valued it ever since. Although the letters on the keyboard are fading it is still going well. The acquisition of a laptop, however, didn't end all my computer problems so I want to thank Tristan for putting up with my lack of technical skills

## ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

when I just didn't get it and for his excellent graphic and design work on the cover pages.

I thank Ahmad, Kirsty, Janet and Elsa for their early support and suggestions. I thank Kathy, Steve and Loraine for their later editorial comments and corrections. I also wish to thank Mazin Qumsiyeh for providing me with an excellent review to send to publishers in those early days of uncertainty. Thanks also to Richard Falk for his support and encouraging comments. I thank Mike for his ideas and encouragement and especially for introducing me to Dr Swee Chai Ang. Her encouragement and dogged determination to see this novel through to printing has been invaluable. Without her support I'm not sure if that would have been possible.

Lastly I want to thank Abdar Rahman Koya and Faiz J. Fattohi for their patience in the final edit and Haji Koya Kutty for having the courage and integrity to publish 'Abraham's Children'.



## Names of the main characters

Fida	- protagonist
Kal	- (Khaled) journalist from Al Jazeera
Tariq	- Kal's friend
Leo Jarrat	- Fida's Grandfather
Valerie	- Leo's new friend
Lindsay and Tariq	- Fida's parents

### **Arafat family:**

Abu Ahmed	- father of Ahmed
Maysoon	- Ahmed's mother
Ahmed	- eldest son, wife Samar, children Faris and Mohammed
Iyad	- second eldest son (at University in UK)
Ali	- youngest son (in prison)
Leila	- eldest daughter
Amal and Suzanne	- twins, youngest children

### **Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development:**

Rasha	- Ramallah office
Fatima	- in Tulkarm

## ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

Butheina	- in Kafr Sur
Hutaf	- in Nablus
Zarifa	- in Jenin

### Other important people in the story:

Sophia	- Palestinian Jew (East Jerusalem)
Hannah	- Canadian Israeli
Moses	- American Israeli, commander in the Israeli military.
Josh	- Israeli peace activist
Uncle Kamel	- close friend of Fida's father (released prisoner)
Abu Murad	- Hamas representative
Bethany and Marylou	- Christian tourists
Asem	- Israeli leader of Christian Zionist bus tour

Jonathan, Valerie and Marwan drove the ambulance from York (the real participants were Mike, Nick, Steve and Heather)

I have used the names of real people where the narrative depicts actual events:

George Galloway and Kevin Oviden; Organizers of Viva Palestina Convoy

Hassan Ghanni from Press TV

I have also created names for minor characters because in the Western main stream media Palestinians are all too often anonymous.



# Contents

Prologue: August 2005	xvii
1 Spring 2006: Confronting emptiness	1
2 The hospitality of strangers	37
3 Bi'lin – the Friday protest	79
4 Al-Quds – so near and yet so far away	103
5 Viva al-Quds	141
6 Tulkarm	169
7 The Hostage	233
8 Steadfast in the face of fear	271
9 Lebanon under fire	311
10 Faris's release	345
11 The dignity of the olive tree	381
12 A coming together	415
13 How many paths?	457
14 Feast of the Tabernacle	475
15 Spring/Autumn 2008: Tiny wooden coffins	521
16 Christmas 2008/9: Operation Cast Lead	579

## ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

17	'Viva... Viva Palestina'	633
18	Hostilities begin	687
19	January 2010: El Arish	731
20	Breaking the siege – Gaza	767
	Epilogue: The year of 2050	799
	Epilogue and Author's Note	809
	Recommended Further Reading	811
	Glossary	815
	Index of significant actual events	819



## Prologue: August 2005

As the warmth of the sun flowed across her face Fida hesitantly opened her eyes. It hadn't been her first attempt at waking but this time instead of fluttering her eye lids and sinking back into her internal world she managed to focus on the face anxiously peering down at her and hold his gaze. She tried to form the word 'Grandpa', but although her lips quivered slightly no sound came.

"Figgi, my darling ..." His words came out choked as tears spilled from his eyes and rolled down the creases in his face. Fida, in her half state of wakefulness gazed absently, mesmerized by the tear droplets made silver by the sun. One by one they slipped down his chin and plopped out of sight by the edge of the bed. A smile spread across her grandfather's face as he gave a brief glance upward. "Thank you God."

Night or day, the time didn't seem to matter, whenever Fida opened her eyes her grandfather was always there. The moments of clarity increased to a level where Fida became aware of her surroundings. She noticed the unfamiliarity of the room; the starched blue aprons of the nurses. In response

to her gaze her grandfather gently took hold of her hand. "We were afraid we'd lost you. You were in an underground train darling when a bomb exploded."

The events of 7th July were hazy but during the weeks of Fida's intermittent consciousness half remembered details gradually surfaced. Her mouth quivered and her question when spoken was barely audible, "Mummy?"

"Lindsay..." her grandfather breathed in heavily then brushed his hand across his eyes before he resumed speaking. "Your mother..." Fida noticed a grey pallor seep into his ruddy farmer's cheeks. Turning his head he glanced anxiously toward someone standing beyond Fida's immediate circle of vision. Fida strained her eyes to see who it was but the effort was too exhausting. Taking hold of her hands her grandfather looked steadily into her eyes. "I'm so sorry love ... your mother didn't make it." He took another deep breath. "She didn't suffer though. It was all over very quickly." Fida felt nothing. She absorbed the words without any visible signs of reaction. The impact of the loss was too deep, too painful. It served only to underline the impoverishment of her feelings. She didn't have the energy to cry and somehow what he was telling her she already knew. She knew it in her waking time and in her sleeping time. Her mother was inside her head, not out there with Grandpa standing some little distance away from him.

"Dr Holroyd is going to help you get better. She'll be here whenever you're ready to start talking about it. You suffered many injuries, especially to your head and face, but



Mr Halpin tells me you're going to be okay. He's a very fine surgeon."

Fida clumsily lifted her hands to her face and ran her fingers over the raised disfigurement. "Can I see?"

"Maybe now isn't the time love. The bandages and stitches have only recently been removed. You have some scarring on your face but Mr Halpin says it'll fade and in time disappear."

"Grandpa, please. I need to see." Her grandfather reluctantly rose from his seat to speak to the person standing beyond him. After a brief exchange he returned, shortly to be followed by a silver haired woman who was discreetly carrying a hand mirror.

"Fida, my name is Dr Holroyd. I work at the hospital. Your injuries were extensive and it will take time for your mind and body to recover. You've been slipping in and out of consciousness for five weeks." She smiled warmly, the sparkle in her eyes authentically kind. "There were times when we, your Grandpa and I, thought you were not coming back to us, that you were going to stay in that world of yours. Your clarity today is a good indication of how resilient you are. But there's no rush. Nature moves at her own steady pace. Your face is very swollen and bruised. The scarring is still inflamed." She frowned. "You don't need to see it today. In a few weeks or so you'll begin to look and feel more like your old self."

Fida tried unsuccessfully to raise her head. "I'd like to see."



Dr Holroyd glanced toward her grandfather who grimaced. Then as an after-thought shrugged his shoulders and nodded. "This is my Figgi of old, always impatient." He grinned. "Never one to do something tomorrow that could be done today."

"Very well;" Dr Holroyd nodded, leaned over the bed and brought the mirror close to Fida so that she could examine her scaring without raising her head.

Even through the haze caused by her swollen eye lids, the sight of her face was shocking. Fida didn't recognize herself. It was as though some alien being had taken possession and was staring back at her with unfocused eyes. She drew in her breath. "And ... Julian? Where's Julian?" she spoke his name hesitantly as though afraid of the answer.

"Julian's fine," said her grandfather, almost too quickly. Even in her dazed state Fida could not fail to pick up on the sharpness of his tone. "He wasn't with you in the underground. It was just you and ..." his voice trailed off. "Julian's been in to see you many times, but he's busy. You know how it is with those banking traders – always making money. The day's not long enough. I expect now that you're back with us you'll see him soon enough."

"Has Julian seen?"

Her grandfather looked uncomfortable. "Yes darling."



## Spring 2006: Confronting emptiness

*The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.*

*Fourth Geneva Convention*

Anger didn't help. Maybe for a while, it fed the primitive passion of a wounded creature, masking the void with its raw, negative energy. Neurotic and heady the unpredictability of it flared from her soul screaming in muffled, stifled implosions. But in the end it was the emptiness that was all consuming. If life were ever to hold meaning again for Fida it was the emptiness that had to be faced, confronted and challenged.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" said Fida's grandfather. "When we talked about you taking a trip I didn't mean.... I was thinking of some sunny place where you could relax, read or go for walks. Make a full recovery"

"You mean somewhere that's not England?" Fida could have added; 'somewhere away from Julian and the pain of his rejection' or maybe he was thinking that in a new place she wouldn't dwell so much on her mother's death.

“No. You could go to Cornwall or better still the Channel Islands. There’s more sunshine there.”

“Palestine is a sunny place.”

“Sun or not, it’s a place of war.” The dark cast across his face momentarily lightened. “Malta ... now there’s an idea. It’s in the Mediterranean and the Maltese people speak English. I heard they’re a very hospitable...”

“Grandpa, don’t. It’s decided. The war in my head is consuming. It’s destroying me. I’d rather confront a war outside of myself than continue like this.”

“Have you spoken to Dr Holroyd?”

“We’ve had many conversations... Grandpa, she understands.”

“Your mother wouldn’t want this. Our family have suffered enough because of this conflict.”

“I’m doing this as much for Mum as for myself. She’ll be with me every moment of my travels. It’s my way of making meaning of her death ... making meaning out of this ugly face. How can I stay here? The shallowness of life is... I feel disconnected.”

“It isn’t as bad as you think. Besides I still see your beauty even if that idiot Julian doesn’t. The scaring has already faded. Mr Halpin says it’ll come right by itself. In six ... twelve months... It’s come such a long way already.”

“I don’t want it to come right.”

“You don’t mean that love.”

“I do. Grandpa, I have to embrace this ugliness. I want something better, deeper. It’s like a part of me is missing.”

“And you think you can find it in Palestine?”

“I don’t know. Please Grandpa, don’t cry.”



After the greenness of England the dry, sandstone sculptured landscape stretched out with an unfamiliarity that was both threatening and exciting. Goats from a distant Bedouin camp tugged at the wild grasses as plants and beasts struggled to survive in the barren desert landscape. The dark haired man driving the limousine sped along the highway as though their lives depended on it. Fida glanced at him contemplating how she could ask whether he was Palestinian or Israeli. She also wanted to know if he was driving fast because there were snipers hiding in the sandy hilltops ready to fire at them and if so who were they? At the Allenby crossing from Jordan into the West Bank she had been alarmed by the sight of the flak jacketed Israeli soldiers standing behind barricades with their machine guns slung across their shoulders. She also hadn’t expected so much hostility from the Israeli immigration. In fact if she had thought about it at all she was really expecting to meet with Palestinian immigration and although she’d heard that there was an Israeli presence she hadn’t fully internalised that occupation meant exactly that ‘occupation – total and uncompromising.’

There was no Palestinian authority to welcome her to their country or to suspiciously scrutinize her documentation. The young girl behind the immigration desk was Israeli. ‘Why are you coming to Israel? The question was simple

The more I read, the more enthusiastic and impressed I am by this contribution to our understanding of the Palestinian ordeal and really beyond this, to an illumination of the human condition.

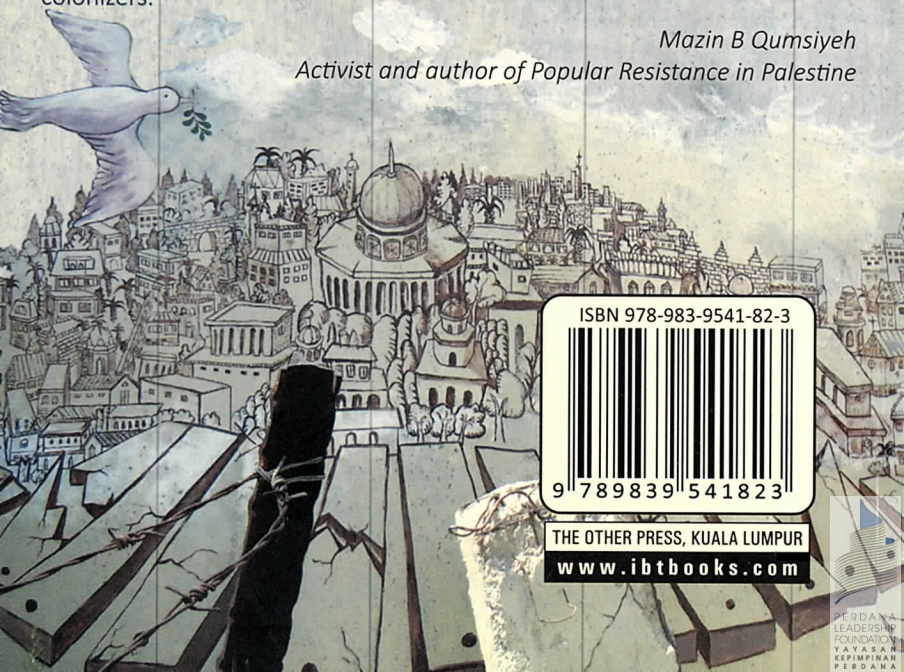
*Richard Falk*  
*United Nations Special Rapporteur*  
*for Human Rights Council in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*

This is an action-packed and gripping love story on multiple levels. The depiction of the lives of ordinary Palestinians – their suffering, resilience, loyalty and courage in the struggle against a brutal military occupation – is highly accurate. These were the qualities in the people I fell in love with 30 years ago in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut. This is an inspiring book, leaving the reader wanting to go out to look for the characters in its pages.

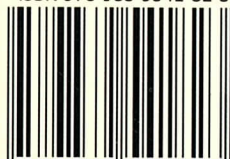
*Dr Ang Swee Chai, Patron, Medical Aid for Palestinians*  
*and author of From Beirut to Jerusalem*

This excellent contribution adds to a rare genre of literature that portrays the real life of the oppressed native people instead of reiterating the myths of the colonizers.

*Mazin B Qumsiyeh*  
*Activist and author of Popular Resistance in Palestine*



ISBN 978-983-9541-82-3



9 789839 541823

THE OTHER PRESS, KUALA LUMPUR  
[www.ibtbooks.com](http://www.ibtbooks.com)

