

# TO BE OR NOT TO BE AIDA REFUGEE CAMP BETHLEHEM

*Al Azzah joins the stage...*

**MOHAMMAD AL AZZA  
ARTIST & PHOTOGRAPHER  
LAJEE CULTURAL CENTRE**

I started photography as an artist. Taking photos in the camp, just daily life, the people, the children, the houses. But the moment you live in Palestine, it becomes difficult to photograph anything unrelated to the Israeli Military Occupation. The situation forces you to cover it again and again.

I was in my office when the shooting started, so as I usually do, I took my camera and stood by the window to take photos. Around 10 Israeli soldiers marched through the camp, firing bullets, tear gas, and sound bombs indiscriminately.

I continued taking photos, and the soldiers continued to approach.

They got to the office where I was leaning out of the window, and they started shouting 'Go to your house now'.

They were exceptionally violent at the time, so I started to close the window.

At that moment, one of the soldiers directed his rifle towards my face and shot me.

The bullet hit me in my face. They shot with the intent to kill; if I had not been on the second floor, I would be dead.

I was screaming while I heard them laughing loudly. I started to bleed very hard. I thought that I was going to die. But I was more worried about the camera than myself because it contained photos of the soldier who shot.

I was hospitalised for 17 days. My eyes were pulled out of their place, and they put platinum pieces to fix the bone. They performed three surgeries.

I couldn't eat because I couldn't move my mouth, and I drank processed food with a straw.

After I got released from the hospital, I stayed with my sister. That night about 40 soldiers broke down the door, storming my parent's home, destroying everything in their way. They gave them a summons notice, demanding I go to interrogation.

I needed to see a doctor for medical follow-ups on my surgery and regularly take my medicine. If I surrendered myself, this wouldn't be possible.

For two months, I secretly moved between several houses in Bethlehem as the army continued to assault my family.

When the condition of my face improved, I went home.

That night they came and broke in.

I ran and escaped, so they attacked my family, even my grandfather and grandmother.

It was a long night. Eventually, they found me and began a violent attack. I begged them not to hit my face, but the moment I asked, they directed their blows there.

They put me in the military base, under investigation for 12 days. They found no evidence for their allegations. I was transferred between 5 courts, none of them able to substantiate the charges against me.

Finally, the judge decided to release me, fining me \$500 and telling me I had to come to the court every month for an interview. This continued for three years.

I went back to the field to work in photography. I decided not to be stationed at the office window anymore. I decided to approach the soldiers, to photograph between them.

After they shot me in the face, what's the worst they can do?

They wanted to kill me to stop me from taking pictures and filming, but it is a challenge that keeps me going.

They pushed me toward the idea: of "to be or not to be."