



# When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life in Ramallah Under Siege

*Raja Shehadeh*

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The Israeli army invaded Ramallah in March 2002. A tank stood at the end of Raja Shehadeh's road; Israeli soldiers patrolled from the roof toops. Four soldiers took over his brother's apartment and then used him as a human shield as they went through the building, while his wife tried to keep her composure for the sake of their frightened children, ages four and six.

This is an account of what it is like to be under siege: the terror, the frustrations, the humiliations, and the rage. How do you pass your time when you are imprisoned in your own home? What do you do when you cannot cross the neighborhood to help your sick mother?

Shehadeh's recent memoir, *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine*, was the first book by a Palestinian writer to chronicle a life of displacement on the West Bank from 1967 to the present. It received international acclaim and was a finalist for the 2002 Lionel Gelber Prize. *When the Birds Stopped Singing* is a book of the moment, a chronicle of life today as lived by ordinary Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza in the grip of the most stringent Israeli security measures in years. And yet it is also an enduring document, at once literary and of great political import, that should serve as a cautionary tale for today's and future generations.

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