THREE RANDOMLY SELECTED LEBANESE CASES OF CHILDREN WHO CLAIM MEMORIES OF A PREVIOUS LIFE

by ERLENDUR HARALDSSON and MAJD ABU-IZZEDDIN

ABSTRACT

The more impressive cases of children who claim to remember a past life may get published with greater frequency than 'run of the mill' cases, giving readers a skewed impression of the phenomena. Thirty children who speak about a previous life were briefly interviewed for the purpose of a psychological study in Lebanon. Three children were randomly selected for a thorough investigation from a pool of 29 of these children (the case of one child had already been investigated). In one case a deceased person was identified whose circumstances in life closely resembled the child’s statements. In another case no person adequately matching the child’s statements was found, and checking the correctness of her statements was impossible due to practical reasons. In the third case the child’s family was related to the alleged previous personality, which could have given the child and its parents ample opportunity to learn by normal means about the previous personality. In addition to the alleged memory aspect, some cases show perplexing psychophysiological and behavioural features.

INTRODUCTION

It may seem that those who investigate spontaneous past-life experiences (PLEs) or 'cases of the reincarnation type' can be criticized for selective reporting, particularly regarding cases in countries such as Sri Lanka, where the majority of cases remain unsolved; that is, no deceased person is found that fits most of the statements that the child has made about the previous life. It is primarily the 'impressive' cases that get published, namely those that show particularly interesting features and seem to favour a paranormal interpretation, whereas cases that show various weaknesses or remain unsolved are less likely to get published.

There are important exceptions to this. Cook, Pasricha, Samararatne, Maung and Stevenson (1983a, 1983b) reviewed extensively the problem of unsolved cases, comparing the features of solved and unsolved cases, and gave illustrative summaries of a few unsolved cases. Stevenson has published detailed accounts of four unsolved cases (Ranjith Makalanda, Wijanama Kithasiri, Ornuma Sua Ying Yong and Ma Tin Aung Myo: Stevenson, 1974, 1977, 1983). Haraldsson has published detailed accounts of three unsolved Sri Lankan cases (Prethibha Gunawardana, Dilupa D. Nanayakkara, Sandika Tharanga: Haraldsson 1991; Haraldsson & Samararatne, 1999). Investigators at the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia and other investigators, such as Mills, Haraldsson and Keil (1994), collect and register all cases that come to their attention, regardless of whether or not they are solved or unsolved, or have weaknesses of various kinds.

Although unsolved cases are reported, there is still a tendency to focus on solved cases in published accounts. Because of prominent reporting of solved cases, readers may be left with an impression more favourable to a paranormal or reincarnation-type interpretation than they might be if summaries of
all the investigated cases (or a random selection of them) were available. This reporting bias is comparable, perhaps, to the 'file-drawer' problem in experimental research, in which experiments with non-significant or negative results are simply put away and forgotten. This bias in the reporting of PLEs is understandable. Investigators with limited time and resources find it more rewarding to investigate thoroughly and write up cases with interesting features, and journals may be more likely to accept reports on such cases than those with less interesting features.

It seemed a worthwhile undertaking to address this problem. Hence this paper describes three cases randomly drawn from a sample of 29 cases that were investigated in Lebanon from 1998 to 2001. It is important to note that, at the time of the decision to investigate these cases thoroughly and publish them, only a brief initial recording of them had taken place. The quality of the cases became known to the investigators only in the course of the investigation. For these two reasons the three cases can be looked upon as 'run of the mill' Lebanese cases, and readers can therefore judge better for themselves the average quality of cases in Lebanon. It should be pointed out that, prior to the random selection of the three cases, an exceptional case from among the original 30 cases had been investigated (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2002). Thus the 'best' of the 30 cases was exempted from the random selection.

The Druze

The Druze are one of four religio-ethnic communities that live in Lebanon, the others being Christian Maronites, Sunni and Shia Moslems. They number around 300,000 in Lebanon; they also live in Syria, Jordan, Israel and as immigrants in other countries. The Druze homeland is in the mountainous area of what is now central and south Lebanon, and their history is usually traced back to the 11th century, when they split off from mainstream Islam (Abu-Izzeddin, 1993). Plato is held in great esteem in the Druze scriptures, and the concept of reincarnation plays an important role in his writings. Reincarnation is an important tenet of the Druze religion. The Druzes are secretive about their religious teaching and their scriptures remain unpublished to the present day.

METHODOLOGY

The children who were the subjects of these cases, their parents and other relatives were interviewed in their homes, each of them independently when possible. We asked (generally of the mother) what statements and behaviour of the child had led them to believe that the child was talking about a previous life. Then we made a list of these statements. The basic facts about each child (such as name, date of birth, sex, age when first speaking about a previous life) were recorded on a registration form developed for this purpose by the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia and modified by the first author. We also inquired whether a previous personality had been identified (i.e. whether the case had been 'solved'), if the child's family had met the alleged previous family,1 and whether steps had been taken to verify the

1 From now on, for easier reporting, we will refer to the alleged previous family and personality as the previous family and previous personality without wishing to imply any assumptions about the correctness of such wording.
child’s statements about the former life. The methodology of investigating cases of the reincarnation type is amply described by Haraldsson (1991) and Stevenson (2001), and should also become clear in the case reports that follow.

In the cases that were selected for further study, the child and its parents were interviewed again and more thoroughly. The previous family was also visited and interviewed, if such a family had been traced (as it was for the three cases in this paper). The emphasis was on how the previous family had learnt about the child, if they had previously had any contact or knowledge of the child’s family, if the statements of the child could be verified, and how they fitted the deceased person who had been identified as the previous personality. This was done by obtaining testimony from relatives, friends and acquaintances of the previous person, and from witnesses to any event in the life of the previous person that was mentioned by the child, and whenever possible by obtaining documents, such as death certificates or any other relevant documents that might be available.

Sample and Selection of Cases

The thirty cases out of which these three were drawn were collected for the purpose of a psychological study (Haraldsson, 2003). For each child in this study it was ascertained that he or she was making or had been making statements that could be interpreted as being about a previous life, but at that time no further investigation of any case was conducted or foreseen, as that would have required more time and funds than were available for the psychological study (Haraldsson, 2003).

The first cases were obtained with help from teachers and staff of a large boarding school and orphanage for Druze children, but we learnt about most of the others from acquaintances and friends, and through people we met in the course of our initial investigations. We studied every case that was brought to our attention until the preset number of 30 was obtained. We ended with 19 boys and 11 girls from Druze families who live in the hilly and mountainous area to the east and south of Beirut, 23 in rural areas and 7 in towns. When we first met them their ages varied from 4.88 to 14.72 years, with a mean age around 10 years and 4 months ($SD = 2.56$). Their parents reported their mean age as 2.58 years ($SD = 0.69$) when they started to speak about a previous life.

When the psychological study was completed it was decided to select randomly three cases for a thorough investigation. As mentioned above, one case had already been selected for a detailed study because of exceptionally interesting features (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin, 2002), and hence was exempted from selection. Some older children were excluded, as it is generally harder to obtain reliable information when several years have passed since the child has been speaking about a previous life. One older case is included among our three cases but a fully random selection might have included more. The children were listed in the order of their first interview. It was decided to use the exceptional case as a starting point. After that, every 7th or 8th case was selected, with the restrictions stated above. We must emphasize that

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the outcome of the investigations, and hence the quality of each case, was unknown when the three cases were selected for further study.

THE CASE OF WAEL KIWAN

We first met Wael Kiwan in March 1999 at his home in Batir in the mountains 70 km east of Beirut. He was 11 years old. At the age of four, according to his mother, he started to say that his name was Rabih, that he had been big, not small as he was now, that he had other parents in Beirut and wanted to know where they were. Later he added other statements: “There was a house with a red brick roof”, and he “lived near a house of Allah Wa Akbar” [i.e. a mosque] in the Jal al Bahr” (a section of Beirut by the sea). He constantly repeated the same story about his death: it was sunset; he saw people coming towards him, and they shot him. His statements are listed in Table 1.

Wael’s mother and her sister (married to two brothers) are devout Druzes and dress in the fashion of a sheikha (female sheikh) in long black garments with a white mandil (scarf) around the head and over the mouth. Many devout Druzes (sheikhs and sheikhas) are found in the rural areas where Druzes live. They are easily distinguished by their black garments and white headwear. Those that we have met were particularly co-operative and hospitable. They keep their houses spotlessly clean, have healthy lifestyles, and are indeed very nice people.

Wael’s mother told us that Wael spoke mostly about the sea and a boat. He would draw a wheel of a boat on paper and say: “I used to stand”, and he did a circular movement of his hands to show how he moved the steering wheel.

*The Search for a Previous Personality*

Wael’s father would often go on business to Beirut. When he returned from such trips Wael would ask him if he had seen his house. When his father said that he had not found the house, he would get upset. Wael would also tell him: “If you find it, don’t tell them that Rabih has died, because they will cry”. He also said that they had a balcony, from which he used to jump to the street. He stated that he had two homes, one in Beirut, and another one to which he had to travel by aeroplane. He did what many children who speak of a previous life do: he said to his mother: “My [previous] mother is prettier than you”. These are the statements that his parents could remember his making before they started to look seriously for a deceased person that fitted Wael’s statements.

Before Wael’s father made any inquiries in Beirut, he, his wife and children sat down with Wael and listed many family names in the hope that he might recognize one of them. Wael kept rejecting names until they mentioned the name Assaf. Then he said yes, that was his previous family name. Assaf is a rather common name and carried by Druze, Christians and Muslims alike.

Wael’s father, Kamal, is a teacher who has a shop and also does business with people in Beirut and brings them goods. He told a Druze friend in Beirut, Sami Zhairi, what Wael was saying about a previous life. Sami promised to ask around. He found out that there was a boy called Rabih Assaf whose life seemed to fit Wael’s statements. Unfortunately, Sami died three years prior to our first investigation of this case.

About a year after Wael made his first statements, his father took him to
Beirut. Accompanied by Sami Zhaihir they went to a house in the Jal al Bahr section. Wael ran into the house before the group, and ran into the apartment on the ground floor. Wael saw a picture on the wall and said, "This is my picture". It was a picture of Rabih Assaf. They met Raja Assaf, the brother of the deceased Rabih (his mother, Munira, was not at home). Raja brought out a photo album and asked Wael to identify people. According to Wael’s father he recognized Rabih’s father, sister and a paternal aunt. When they left the house and were driving back home Wael told his father that now he was relieved that he had found his previous home.

Back home, Wael asked his mother to close her eyes, and said: "I have something nice for you". When she opened her eyes, he showed her a picture and said: "See how I was as an adult". After that he kept this picture of Rabih under his pillow. After the meeting with the Assaf family he spoke little about his previous life and now does not talk spontaneously about it at all. Later there were further visits between the families. Even at the time of our interviews he was occasionally speaking to his previous family over the phone.

As we were interviewing his parents, Wael came home from school. When we asked him if he remembered anything about a previous life, he answered that he was forgetting his previous memories and he could not tell us anything. By the age of 11 memories of an alleged previous life have usually faded away, although some children continue to remember something (Stevenson, 2001). At a second meeting, in January 2001, he told us he still remembered how he was shot. It seems common among children who claim to remember a previous life that the imagery of the death scene lasts longer than other memories.

Wael’s mother told us that Wael gave two versions of his death. The first was that "they" shot him in his head. The second version was that a group of people kicked him and hit him until he did not feel anything (hence his parents assumed that he had been killed). A week before Wael’s birth, his mother dreamt of a grown-up boy who had a moustache, black hair and an open shirt on. The grown-up boy was sweating, and breathing rapidly with difficulty. Wael’s mother said that the boy in the dream looked like the photo of Rabih.

*How Close is the Correspondence with Rabih’s Life?*

A few days after our first meeting with Wael’s family, we visited Munira Assaf, Rabih’s mother, at her home in the Jal al Bahr section of Beirut. (Her husband, Rabih’s father, died in 1976.) Munira lives on the ground floor in a four-story house close to the sea. She told us that her son, Rabih, died in South Pasadena, California on 9 January 1988. He had moved to the USA when he was 21 years old, and studied electrical engineering for two years. During the third year he wanted to return to Beirut, but was unable to do so because of the civil war in Lebanon. In addition, he did not have enough money either to stay in California, or to return to Beirut. Rabih was a very sensitive boy. He was depressed and attempted suicide by swallowing pills, but was brought to a hospital and survived. After some treatment for his suicide attempt, he was discharged.

Rabih was staying with his relatives in the USA. They did not tell his mother about his suicide attempt until after he had died. The relatives tried to keep him from attempting another suicide. On 9 January 1988 his paternal cousin,
Abboud Assaf, found Rabih dead in his garage. He had hanged himself. This was validated to us by Abboud Assaf in a telephone interview.

Wael not only said that "they" shot him but also that a group of people kicked him and hit him until he did not feel anything. The latter might mean that at some point in a previous life he was beaten up but not necessarily killed. Rabih's mother was not aware of any such incident, nor was Abboud Assaf or Salah Assaf, a relative and friend when Rabih was living in California.

Munira first learnt of Wael Kiwan when his family brought him to her home in Beirut. She was not at home at that time but her son, Raja, was. When Wael came the second time, he went into the house, running happily around, but did not recognize Rabih's mother, his twin sister, or his brother. Wael seemed relieved to be there and happy. Munira did not remember if he recognized any photographs, but she did remember that they showed him photographs and he said: "Yes, yes". She took this to mean that he might know the people in the photographs.

Table 1

*Statements Made by Wael Kiwan According to his Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My name was Rabih.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was big (not small).</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have parents. They are not here, they are in Beirut.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My house is in Beirut near the sea.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My house is near the house of Allah Wa Akbar (mosque).</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There is a house with red brick roof.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It was sunset and I saw people coming and they shot me.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A group of people hit me and kicked me until I did not feel anything.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I was often on a boat out at sea.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I used to stand and steer the boat with a wheel.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I would walk from my house to the sea.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. My house is in Jal al Bahr.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I had two homes, one in Beirut, and one to which I go in an aeroplane.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. We had a balcony.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I used to jump from the balcony to the street.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I used to throw an 'iron' to stop the boat (only reported by his aunt).</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My [previous] mother is prettier than you.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statements corresponding to the life of Rabih Assaf are marked by +, those that do not by −, and indeterminate items by ?

What convinced Munira that Wael was Rabih reborn? When he first visited her home, he asked about the house with a red roof. A house with a red roof had stood behind their four-story building but had been torn down by the time Wael visited. Rabih had grown up seeing it from their apartment. This more
than anything else made her believe Wael. Of course his family had also told her what other statements he had made, but these other statements did not convince her as much. Munira was not completely convinced by this one statement but, because Wael also seemed very relieved and happy with them, she believed he was her son reborn. She expected to learn more from him about his life as Rabih but she did not. She still believed and accepted him, but also said: “Nothing will bring my son back.” Wael’s mother and father acknowledged that Wael had made the statements in Table 1 before the deceased Rabih Assaf was traced in Beirut.

In January 2001 we visited Munira Assaf again. Her apartment is on the ground floor and has a balcony. It is easy to jump from the balcony to the street, something Rabih often did, according to his mother. Wael had mentioned jumping from a balcony to the street before meeting the Assaf family or seeing the house. Munira showed us an official document stating Rabih’s date of birth as 12 August 1964, and his date of death as 9 January 1988.

Wael had repeatedly mentioned a boat. Munira’s husband and sons had no boat but their friends, relatives and neighbours did. The boats were only some 30 metres down at the end of the street, where there was, and still is, a fishermen’s harbour (see Figure 1). This harbour is now crammed between houses and a huge high-rise apartment building that has been built recently. Rabih would often go to sea with the fishermen, some of whom were his friends and cousins. Most of the boats were rowing boats, and a few had motors that had a tiller (“steering piece of wood”). The boats were unlikely to have had [steering] wheels. However, Rabih might sometimes have had a ride on a boat with a wheel.

![Figure 1](image)

Wael had said he lived near a mosque in his previous life. There is an old mosque approximately 100 metres away from Rabih’s house on the same street as the harbour. It is the only mosque in the Jal al Bahr area of Beirut. The statement that Rabih had two homes, one of which you had to go to with an aeroplane, fits the fact that Rabih also lived in the United States. Item 16, “I used to throw an iron to stop the boat” was only reported to us by Wael’s aunt Fadia. By iron (hadideh in Arabic) Wael probably meant an anchor. Living far from the sea he might not have known the right Arabic word for anchor.
According to Wael’s parents, Wael made a number of recognitions, largely from photographs. This was vaguely confirmed by Rabih’s mother and brother. Also, as stated before, Wael recognized the name Assaf as his previous family name, which was in fact Rabih’s family name.

Comment

One of the merits of the case is that the two families lived far apart and were complete strangers. The principal weakness of this case, like all Lebanese cases that we have investigated, is that the subject’s statements were not recorded until after the two families had met. Twelve of the seventeen statements Wael made about a previous life correspond to events in the life of Rabih Assaf. According to Wael’s family he made all these statements before they met the Assaf family. Four items are such that through our inquiries they could neither be confirmed nor refuted. The statement that Rabih would stand in the boat holding a [steering] wheel, may be correct, but this was certainly not the rule because the small boats in which he often went to sea would be more likely to have had tillers than wheels.

One crucial item does not fit, namely the mode of death. This is the only major discrepancy between Wael’s statements and the life of Rabih. Rabih committed suicide, whereas Wael speaks (mostly) of being shot. If we allow some speculation and fantasy, then the following statement by Wael may carry some significance, “If you find my family, don’t tell them that Rabih has died. They will cry”. Could it possibly mean that he had some guilt about his mode of death or that he did not want it to be known? In view of the hanging the ‘announcing dream’ of Wael’s mother is also interesting, as she dreamt before Wael’s birth of a grown-up boy who was sweating, and breathing rapidly with difficulty. Could this be related to Rabih’s hanging?

The items that correspond particularly well are the name Rabih, the family name Assaf (which he did not remember spontaneously but recognized, see above), that he lived close to the sea and went to sea on boat(s), the closeness of a mosque to his home, that he would jump from his balcony to the street, that he had lived in two places, to one of which he had to travel by aeroplane, and the statement that he made when he first visited the Assaf family, namely that behind his home there had been a house with a red roof which was no longer there when Wael visited them. Many of these statements are quite specific and make a paranormal interpretation appear not unreasonable.

The Case of Nadine Maan

Nadine Maan was four years and eleven months old when we first met her in August 1998. She lives with her parents in Maaruffiyeh, some 25 km from Beirut, and is the second-youngest of four sisters. Her father is an officer in the security police, and a prize-winning athlete, and her mother works at home and looks after their four daughters. Nadine claims to remember her previous name, Randa (or Ranya), the name of her husband, Ramiz, who, she says, strangled her and threw her into the sea. She would show her mother how he did this by placing her hands around her throat.

According to Nadine’s mother, her statements about a previous life had started when she saw a boat on television. She told her mother that she had
a yacht. She was then a year and a half old (or perhaps a little older). Nadine spoke about her daughter, Reema, and how much she wanted her. Sometimes she would get a pillow, wrap it in a blanket and take it with her when they went for a drive in their car. She would put it in the back seat of the car and tell her mother, “This is how I used to put my daughter”. Sometimes she takes a pillow, sometimes a doll, and says, “This is my daughter”.

Nadine’s father has a different memory of when and why Nadine started to speak about a previous life. When she was about a year and a half old the family went to Sidon on the coast and took a small boat over to an island. When they went into the boat Nadine started shivering with fear. Her three sisters could swim but she could not. When her father tried to put her into the water she was extremely scared and shivering and grasped his arms in great fear. When they came back home, she told them: “They killed me in the sea.” After this trip she started to speak about her daughter Reema and her family in the previous life.

As soon as she could talk she would say a lot, but they did not understand well what she was saying. She would get so emotional that her neck would get red and swollen. She would often repeat the same story about the previous life. When visitors came she would tell them her story and ask them to take her to her daughter Reema. Then she would add: “If you do that I will give you a car.” She would get involved with babies, wanting to change their nappies and hold them in her arms. If she were asked whether she liked her previous husband, she would say: “Yes, he strangled me but I love him.” We offered to take her to Reema if she could tell us where she lived. Then she became silent.

Observations by Banan Abu Thiab, Nadine’s Paternal Aunt

One of those who observed Nadine’s neck getting red and swollen was her paternal aunt, Banan Abu Thiab, whom we interviewed in January 2001. This happened particularly in Nadine’s early years when it was difficult to understand what she was talking about. She told Banan that she was at sea and she died. Banan had heard from Nadine all but three of the statements listed in Table 2: (3) “My husband scratched me”, (10) “My husband liked to drink arak”, and (13) “My house is up high”. Banan had heard a slightly different version of number 9: “I liked to cook tabuli and potatoes for my husband.” According to her, Nadine would repeat the same statements over and over again. She also said that Nadine was scared of water. Nadine once tried to strangle Banan’s son. When she was asked why she did this she replied, “He looks like Ramiz”.

Banan observed Nadine talking on the phone. She would say: “Ramiz, I have put the food for you on the table. Send me the car with the driver” (khawaja, meaning male driver) and “Now my daughter Reema should be coming back from school”. Nadine still plays at being on the phone with her previous husband. This was confirmed by her mother. Nadine’s mother added that sometimes, when she is playing with other children, she gives them the names of her previous family. It is not uncommon that ostensible previous-life memories of children find expression in play (Stevenson, 2000).\(^2\)

\(^2\) An interesting question for further research is whether there is an overlap between cases of children
Table 2  
*Statements Made by Nadine Maan about her Previous Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Witness to statements:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Banan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My name was Randa (later changed to Ranya.)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My husband's name was Ramiz.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My husband scratched me (also, I scratched my husband).</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I had a yacht.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want Reema.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. That is how I used to put my daughter. (She would wrap a pillow with a blanket and put it on the back seat when going in the car).</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Now my daughter Reema would also be going to school.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I had a store.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I used to make tabouli (Lebanese dish) for my husband.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My husband liked to drink arak [or] I served him arak.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My husband put his hands around my neck and strangled me.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Then he threw me in the sea.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I grabbed the handle on the boat. They pushed me again into the sea.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I drowned.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My house is up high.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My house is near a school.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My bedroom was nicer (than my present bedroom).</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. My house was more beautiful.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. My daughter has her own room.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I used to see my husband kiss the Sri Lanka maid.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. My husband is very jealous.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I had two male drivers.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I had a four-wheel drive car.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we next met Nadine in January 2001 she had changed one or two of her statements (see below) and her father, whom we then met for the first time, told us about some additional statements. Nadine's statements are listed in Table 2.

*A Suspected Previous Personality*

When we first met Nadine in August 1998 and again in March 1999 her case was one of three cases in our 30-case collection considered 'unsolved' by the

speaking of a previous life, and cases of children with imaginary playmates, and if so how much. The first author recalls one vivid case in Sri Lanka, in which the child would often speak over the phone to his alleged friends from the previous life.
parents of the subject. Nadine’s parents knew of no deceased person that fitted Nadine’s statements about a previous life. When we visited them in January 2001 they told us they had learned from a distant relative about a young woman who was on a yacht in Saudi Arabia with her husband and brother-in-law. When they returned to shore they reported that she had drowned. Later the two men were accused of murder. One of them was tried and found guilty. All these people were Druzes.

At about the same time Nadine’s father was at a neighbour’s house. People there were talking about Nadine and how she spoke of having a daughter, a husband who was called Ramiz, etc. There a man, RS, told them that he had been in prison, where he met a man (we will call him SF) who was accused of choking his sister-in-law, Bassima, to death and throwing her body into the sea. The brother of SF, Bassima’s husband, was accused of the same crime but was out of reach of Lebanese justice as he was living in another country. Bassima had been related to both men. It is not uncommon among Druzes that couples are related, as marriages are often arranged.

Nadine’s father visited this family, who live near Beirut. Nadine and her sister Nelly went with him in the car, but he went alone into the house of the parents of the woman who had been drowned. Before they left, Nadine asked her father if he would protect her if her previous husband were to try to kill her again.

We were able to meet RS at his home. He had been in prison six years earlier. There he met SF, who told him that he had lived for some time in Saudi Arabia. On his return to Lebanon he was arrested. The father of the drowned woman accused SF and their son-in-law of murdering their daughter. SF told RS that before her death his father had told him that Bassima was misbehaving (no details were given).

We met the parents of Bassima at their home near Beirut. Their daughter was born in 1962, and in 1977 had married a relative who was a mason. They later moved to Saudi Arabia. Bassima died in April 1988. The Saudi police reported her cause of death as drowning. However, according to the medical report, there were bruises on her back. On hearing this Bassima's father filed a suit in Lebanon against Bassima’s husband and brother-in-law. Bassima’s parents believed that their daughter had been drowned but were reluctant to discuss the matter with us. The case went to court in 1993 in Baabda in Mount Lebanon.

The court proceedings against Bassima's husband and brother-in-law (Case No.682/98, concluded 16 November 1998) state that two witnesses came forward and testified that Bassima’s brother-in-law had told them how they had drowned Bassima in the sea. At the sea resort of Jeddah, Bassima, her husband, and her brother-in-law went out to sea in a rubber motorboat. Then the two men got off the boat, “held Bassima’s hair from the back and pushed her down in the water until she died. Then they went back to the shore and reported her as being drowned in the sea.” Their three children were with them at the resort and the oldest was then seven years old. Bassima’s husband was sentenced in absentia to hard labour for life, and his brother to 10 years' hard labour, later reduced to five years.

Bassima’s parents rejected the notion that Nadine might be their daughter
reborn. When Bassima died there had been no contact between Bassima and her parents for eight years. Her husband forbade her to write, they told us. Hence they did not even know the names of Bassima’s two daughters.

They consented to our reading to them the statements made by Nadine; they would respond if the statements were correct or not for Bassima. They said their daughter’s name was not Ranya or Randa, her husband’s name was not Ramiz and they had no yacht. To the best of their knowledge Bassima did not have a store. In their view the only correspondence between Bassima’s life and Nadine’s statements was that their daughter died at sea, and was drowned.

Some Unusual Behavioural Features

Nadine has enjoyed putting on her mother’s make-up from the time she was two and half years old. She likes to dress up, wear beautiful clothes and high heels, and watch herself in front of the mirror. Sometimes she will get a tight shirt from her sister, and stuff it with something to make her look as if she has breasts. We asked her if she would like a photo of herself. She ran away and put on lipstick, then came back and the Polaroid photo was made. We asked whether she was also romantic and showed interest in boys. “No, she hates boys,” her mother said, “and complains to her father if they speak to her.”

Nadine’s mother feels that Nadine is not naughty but demands a lot of attention. She is argumentative. (This was found to be particularly common in Sri Lanka among children speaking of a previous life—Haraldsson, 1997.) She can argue about many things, arguing with her father as if she were his wife, and telling him what is wrong and what is right. If someone called her Nadine, she would say, “I am Ranya”. She also used to talk to herself about her previous life. She gets angry easily over small things.

Below we have listed some unusual behavioural features shown by Nadine:—

- Had fear of sea and water.
- Her throat would become red and swollen when speaking about her previous life.
- Plays at being on the phone with her previous husband.
- When playing with children, she may give them the names of her previous family.
- Once tried to strangle a young relative. When asked why, she replied that he looked like Ramiz.
- Has liked putting on make-up and lipstick from the time she was 2½ years old.
- Likes to wear high heels, dress up, pad her chest to simulate breasts, and watch herself in front of the mirror.
- If someone calls her Nadine, she will sometimes say she is Ranya (Randa).
- Used to talk to herself about her previous life.

Account of Nadine’s Statements and Behaviour by her Father

Nadine’s father is away from home for most of the week. It was not until January 2001 that we were able to interview him. Thus the statements in Table 2, witnessed by Nadine’s mother and her aunt Banan, were reported
before the previous personality appeared on the scene, whereas the statements
by her father were reported to us after a suspected previous personality had
been found by Nadine’s family.

In Lebanon the mothers are the more attentive to what children say and do
that might conceivably be related to a previous life. In Nadine’s case, however,
it was the father who filled this role. He considers Nadine a special child and
shows much interest in her talk about a previous life. She has apparently
spoken much more to him about it than to her mother. He praised his daughter
for her intelligence, fine memory and kind heart. The first two characteristics
are often found in children who speak of a previous life (Haraldsson, 1997).
Her sisters tease her for her talk about a previous life. In Sri Lanka it is the
common lot of the subjects of cases to be the object of teasing, but this seems to
occur less frequently in Lebanon.

We have already mentioned her father’s account of Nadine’s first instance of
fear of the sea. He also told us about a new aspect of the case. Nadine had also
said, “I used to see my husband kiss the Sri Lanka maid”, and “My husband
is very jealous”. When we told him that this item was new to us he uttered a
word of mild criticism to his wife for not telling us about this (perhaps she had
found Nadine’s statement inappropriate). When we asked him if these items
had come up after they learned about the murder case of Bassima, he replied
negatively. (Many Sri Lankan women work as maids in Arab countries, such
as in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.) Nadine’s father also reported to us that
Nadine had made statements about having a four-wheel drive car and two
male drivers. Once when he had bought a four-wheel drive car she commented
that her car was better. He also reported that Nadine had said to her mother:
“I am prettier than you.” Bragging is a rather common feature among children
in Lebanon and Sri Lanka who talk about a previous life (Haraldsson, 1997;
Haraldsson, Fowler & Periyannanpillai, 2000).

A cousin visited Nadine’s family recently. He said that he had heard that
the drowned woman had not been behaving well (usually this means sexual
misbehaviour). When he left, Nadine told her father that she didn’t want to
see him again. She added that she was not the one who did not behave well; it
was her husband who did not behave.

Nadine had given her father further details about her mode of death. Nadine
said they had pushed her under the water, up and down, until she saw herself
drowning. She remembers there was a handle on the boat. She grabbed the
handle but they pushed her down again into the sea.

Nadine’s father told us that she always said that her previous name was
Ranya, whereas her mother says she first said Randa and then changed it to
Ranya some three years ago. Nadine asked her father to call her Ranya, not
Nadine. At the time of our interview with Nadine’s father, Nadine would only
talk about her previous life if she was asked. Nadine’s family seem convinced
that they have found Nadine’s previous personality; for them the story is the
same, the woman was in a boat and she was drowned at sea.

Of particular interest is the statement by Nadine’s mother that Nadine’s
neck would become red and swollen when she was speaking about the previous
life. The veins became visible on her throat. This happened often when she
first started speaking about a previous life, but much less at the time of our
interviews, when she seldom mentioned it. By that time she did not want her mother to talk to others about what she had said earlier about a previous life. For some children the retelling of their accounts of a previous life becomes a nuisance as they grow older.

**Comment**

We were not able to contact persons who could have given us sufficient information about Bassima's life in Saudi Arabia for us to be able to check all of Nadine's statements (alternatively, such information was withheld). However, it seems certain that Bassima was murdered by her husband and an accomplice, and that she was thrown into the sea or drowned in the sea.

On the negative side we know that Bassima's name was not Randa or Ranya, her husband's name was not Ramiz, and she did not have a daughter by the name of Reema. Through a distant relative we succeeded in obtaining the names of Bassima's children: Ola, Amira and Fatin—three girls with no Reema among them. Furthermore, it is certain that Bassima and her husband did not have a yacht, nor would their financial circumstances have allowed them to keep two male drivers. For the verifiable items we find more discrepancy than correspondence with Nadine's statements. The rest of Nadine's statements can be neither confirmed nor refuted.

This case does not only involve alleged memories of a previous life. It has some remarkable behavioural, emotional and even physiological features. We will mention two of them again: her throat would become red and swollen when speaking about her murder and drowning, and once she tried to strangle a young relative because he looked like her husband Ramiz. This illustrates Nadine's intense psychological involvement.

**THE CASE OF SASHA CHEHAYEB**

Sasha was ten years old when we first met her and her parents in November 1999 at their home in Aley. We asked Sasha if she remembered anything about a previous life. She replied that her memories had passed and she no longer remembered. It had first occurred to her parents that Sasha might be referring to a previous life when she would put a handmade scarf around her head and say: "I am the bride" and "I have a baby". At this time she could barely speak. When they were going for a drive and saw a boy carrying a toy gun, she said to her father, "Ta, ta," imitating the sound of a gun. At this time she was one year and four months old. When she was about two and half years old they were going for a drive near the village of Aytat and passed a ruined house. Then Sasha said to her father, "I am wa wa [baby talk for pain] and then I slept." They thought that she might be remembering a previous life, for they understood this to mean, I was in great pain and that was the end of my life.

One day they were going to the village to buy petrol, and her father mentioned the name Khalil (referring to Khalil Chehayeb, who owns a petrol station and is a friend of her father). Then Sasha said: "He is cute". After that she often said that she wanted to go and visit Khalil, but not Khalil at the petrol station.

Her mother, Thurayah, was pregnant at this time and Sasha pretended that she was also pregnant, and that she was going to call her baby Bashar (male
name). She also played with a doll she named Bashar. Sasha said that she had been pregnant. She said that she and Khalil were going to call their baby Bashar.

Sasha spoke about her mode of death, saying that she had heard an aeroplane and that the ceiling fell and she fell down. Sasha said this after they had driven past an abandoned house in ruins. Sasha has a fear of aeroplanes. Sasha also told her mother: “I am older than you, don’t yell at me”, indicating that she felt herself to be a grown-up person.

Sasha had also been making the kind of remarks that children claiming memories of a previous life often make, and which can make life difficult for their parents. She stated that their house was not like her previous house, and that she did not have such clothes as she used to have; in short, she was comparing her past and present lives and complaining about the present one, and saying that her mother was not her real mother. In the first meeting with a potential previous family (see below) Sasha’s mother complained that Sasha was making her suffer. Sasha’s statements are listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Statements Made by Sasha Chehayeb According to her Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I want to see Khalil.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am a bride (married woman).</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Khalil is cute.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>He has a half-beard.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>He smokes a pipe.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I heard an aeroplane.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The ceiling fell and I fell down.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I was carried out of the building.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I died.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I was pregnant.</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Khalil and I were going to call our baby Bashar.</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Khalil used to bring me gifts.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statements corresponding to the life of Sana are marked by +, those that do not by −, and indeterminate items by ?

A Potential Previous Personality is Identified

As in the two previous cases, no recording was made of the child’s statements before the two families met, which makes the reconstruction of Sasha’s original statements and behaviour difficult, especially five years after the families met (it is usually difficult to remember a sequence of events that took place several years ago). We obtained somewhat different views of how the first contact was established between Sasha and the family of a deceased woman, Sana, whom Sasha’s parents identified as her previous personality.

Sana’s family was well known in the Druze community. Her father had been a minister in the Lebanese government, and owned a business selling fertilizers and merchandise to farmers. The family lived in Abadieh, where
some relatives of Sasha’s family were also living. In addition, Sasha’s mother, Thuraiyah, was distantly related to Khalil. She was brought up in Venezuela and did not return to Lebanon until 1990, when Sasha was one year old.

On 25 June 1982, at the time of the Israeli invasion of Beirut, several rockets bombarded the village of Abadieh. One of them hit the house of Khalil Zahr, killing seven people, four of them inside the building. The roof came down over some of them. Khalil lost his wife Sana, his mother, his cousin and her daughter. Khalil and Sana were a young couple, and their relatives told us that they had a particularly loving relationship. Sana was said to have been pregnant with their first baby. This tragic event became national news, especially among the Druze community. An obituary of Sana was published in Al-Nahar, a major Lebanese newspaper, on 21 July 1982 after being delayed by the war situation. Correspondences between Sasha’s statements and facts in the life of Sana may therefore be of meagre evidential value.

Several of Sasha’s statements seem to fit the life of Sana: Khalil was a handsome man, had a half-beard and smoked a pipe, the ceiling fell down on Sana and others in the house, she was carried out of the building and she died a few minutes later. The relationship between Sana and Khalil was described as particularly loving, so it is likely that Khalil often brought Sana gifts. Particularly interesting is the statement about what Khalil and Sana were going to name the child they were said to be expecting, as this is likely to have been known only by the closest family members. It has been difficult to ascertain this name: Khalil’s sisters, Hayat and Hanan, were not sure about it. They agreed that it had a ‘sh’ sound in it, and was a Muslim name. Hayat said: “Maybe Rashad was the name”; Hanan said, “Maybe Bashar”. Both are Muslim names. The sisters agreed that Bashar was probably the name Khalil and Sana had planned for their baby if it were a boy. However, when we finally reached Khalil, we obtained very different information. Sana had not been pregnant at the time of her death. People had circulated a rumour that she was pregnant but only he and she knew that she had not been pregnant. If he had wanted to name a son at that time it would have been Omar, and not Bashar.

Meetings Between Sasha and Members of Sana’s Family

We interviewed several important witnesses who are members of Khalil’s or Sana’s family. We were particularly interested in checking some claims of recognitions, some of which were from photographs. We will describe these in chronological order as this also shows how Sasha met various members of Khalil’s family.

Hayat Zahr Najjar is the headteacher of a school in Abadieh. She first met Sasha’s mother, Thuraiyah, at a social gathering (Scout celebration day) in Abedieh. Sasha might then have been five or six years old. Thuraiyah told Hayat that she had a daughter who was making her suffer, and she wished that someone could help her. Her daughter was talking about Khalil (adding, “not the Khalil at the gas station”). She said that Khalil had a half-beard, smoked a pipe, always brought her gifts, and that her previous mother was “different from her” (Thuraiyah). Hayat told Sasha’s mother that she and Khalil would soon come and visit Sasha to see what might happen.
The distance between Aley, where Sasha lives, and Abedieh is about four kilometres by road.

Two or three months after Thurayah had visited Hayat, she and Khalil had still not paid a visit to Sasha. Thurayah therefore brought Sasha to Hayat, who showed her some photographs. She opened a big album and asked Sasha to look at them. On the first page was a photo of a young couple. The moment she opened the album, Sasha said: “This is Khalil, not Khalil Chehayeb” (owner of the petrol station) and pointed to him, and, “this is Sana”, and pointed to her. The picture was an engagement photo of the couple. Hayat then said to her, “Sana was big and you are small”, and Sasha replied, “I was the big Sana”. Hayat showed her other family photographs, but Sasha did not mention any more names. She was, however, happy to see the photographs. Hayat told us she was rather impressed with Sasha’s recognition of this one photograph.

Zahr Adnan and her brother, Hassan Mahmoud Adnan, live in Abedieh. They are cousins of Khalil and were the first close relatives of Khalil and Sana that Sasha met. One day Thurayah came with her daughter to visit her grandfather’s family, who lived in a house close by. Sasha started playing with children outside. By chance she came with these children into Zahr and Hassan’s house. She happened to see a family photo on a table with some 10–15 people, relatives of the Adnan family. Sasha then pointed to a man in the photo and said: “This is Khalil”. She added that Khalil had shaved off his beard (which was true). She also said that she did not like the tie Khalil was wearing. This photo had been taken after Sana’s death. Sana and Khalil had visited Hassan and Zahr in this house not long before Sana died but there was no recognition of them or their house.

Emma Najjar, wife of Sleiman, who was Sana’s uncle, told us that Mrs Zahr Adnan brought Sasha to her house one day. When she walked into the flat she said, “Auntie Emma”. Mrs Adnan brought her some photos to look at. Sasha pointed to one photo and said: “This is uncle, not Thurayah’s grandfather Said”. The uncle she pointed at was Emma’s husband, Sleiman, but she did not mention his name. What Sasha said was right. This man was Sasa’s paternal uncle Sleiman (brother of Fuad, who was Sana’s father). Then Emma saw, or picked out, another picture. “This is me”, Sasha said, “and this is . . .” (she mentioned a name but Emma no longer remembers who it was, but he or she had been a friend of Sana’s). Sasha wanted the photo and Emma gave it to her. Sasha was correct. Sana was in the photograph and her friend, whose name she mentioned, was on a hospital bed (Sasha had shown us this photo when we visited her).

Emma showed Sasha many photos of various members of Sana’s family. Sasha did not respond to any but the two mentioned above, nor did she make any statements about her previous life. Emma said that perhaps Sasha knew that she was visiting Auntie Emma. Emma did not know if she did or not. Was she impressed with Sasha? Yes, slightly impressed.

Aniseh Najjar was Sana’s mother. She told us that she first heard about Sasha from her sister-in-law, Emma Najjar, who had seen Sasha and spoken to her. Some two or three months later Sasha and her mother visited her when Aniseh was staying overnight in Wadi and Wadia Najjar’s house. Sasha was shy and did not approach her. When asked, Sasha could tell Aniseh her name
and the name of Aniseh’s husband (Fuad, Sana’s father), but not the name of Sana’s brother whom Sana had loved very much. Aniseh believes that Sasha had been told her name and that of her husband, Fuad.

Aniseh told us that she took Sasha to another room to be with her alone, and showed her several photographs. First she showed her a photograph of her husband and asked who was in the photograph. “My uncle”, Sasha replied. To a photo of Khalil, Sasha also replied, “Uncle”. For all the men she replied, “Uncle”.

Aniseh was in the USA at the time of the rocket attack. Sana had been with her but left for Lebanon shortly before she died. Sana wanted to be with her husband. Aniseh thought that Sana had been pregnant, but Sana never told Aniseh about any particular name she would give to a child. Aniseh was unimpressed by Sasha. Aniseh said that Sasha had not recognized anyone in the photos, and said nothing to convince her that she was her deceased daughter reborn.

Maarouf Zahr owns a grocery store in Abadieh. Sasha’s parents told us that when Sasha was two-and-a-half to three years old and they were visiting in Aley she saw a man, became scared and said: “This is the last man I saw in my previous life”. Sasha’s father was slightly acquainted with Maarouf, and later he learned from him that after the rocket attack he had carried Sana, who was seriously injured, from her house to a neighbour’s house where she died. We interviewed Maarouf. He had been 60–70 metres from the house when the rocket hit. He ran towards the house to help the injured people. He and Khalil’s father, Mohammed, who had been in the house but escaped unharmed, carried Sana to a neighbour’s house. Sana told Maarouf to go back and get Khalil. When he returned a few minutes later she had expired. Hayat was in Khalil’s house when it was shelled and was also injured. She saw Sana seriously injured on the floor and saw how her father, Mohammed, and Maarouf Zahr carried Sana out of the building shortly before she died.

Khalil Zahr met Sasha for the first time at a social gathering, some time after her meeting with Aniseh (this gathering had not been arranged as an opportunity for them to meet). When Sasha saw Khalil she told her mother that Khalil had changed. She said that he used to have a “half-beard”; Khalil had no beard when he met Sasha. They met only briefly. Sasha asked Khalil: “Do you still smoke a pipe?” He did not answer. Khalil knew that this was Sasha and asked about her story from his sister, Hayat. Khalil now lives in Saudi Arabia and we were not able to meet him.

In the summer of 1999 Sasha and her mother met the previous family again at a large wedding party. Sasha then asked her mother if she might speak to Aniseh. Sasha said to Aniseh: “How are you? I am Sasha.” According to Sasha’s mother Aniseh just gave her a friendly stroke on her cheek but did not talk to her.

Sana’s father died in a car accident in 1993. When Sasha heard about the news she cried a lot, her parents told us. She had never met him.

Comment

This case contains few statements, some recognitions, and some behavioural features. The principal weaknesses of the case are that the child and the alleged
previous family are distantly related, the death was well known in the area, and the investigation took place several years after the statements and recognitions were made and observed. It might, though, be pointed out that Sana’s death occurred seven years before Sasha was born and is hence unlikely to have been an active topic of conversation by the time Sasha was born. It is interesting to note the differences between how various members of the alleged previous family perceive the evidential value of the case. Sana’s mother Anisheh found nothing—neither recognitions nor knowledge of Sana’s life—to convince her that Sasha might be her daughter reborn. Hayat, Zahr, Hassan and Emma, on the other hand, were somewhat impressed with Sasha’s recognitions of photos. Different members of the alleged previous family sometimes hold different views regarding the possibility of the case being viewed as ‘solved’ or not. Sometimes differences in socio-economic status of the two families can play a role but that seems unlikely in this case.

DISCUSSION

What do the three cases that we selected semi-randomly from a pool of 30 cases in Lebanon reveal? They vary widely in many respects. Parents of all three children believe they have identified who their child was in the previous life. Do we as outside observers find sufficient evidence to confirm a close correspondence between the child’s statements and facts in the life of some deceased person? If so, are we adequately sure that the child could not have learned normally about the identified deceased person?

In the case of Wael Kiwan we find a high correspondence between his statements (many of then quite specific) and the life of Rabih, who became identified as his previous personality. Only the mode of death differs. Additionally, the two families were complete strangers and lived far apart.

The case of Nadine is different. Our investigation did not confirm any correspondence except the mode of death with the life of the person that Nadine’s parents had identified as her previous personality. In the judgement of the authors a matching previous personality has not been found. The statements that seem in principle verifiable are the mode of death, the murder and drowning of a young mother by her husband at sea. What makes the search for such an event difficult is the fact that Lebanon has a long coast with thousands of boats and yachts, and there is no centralized recording of persons drowned or missing at sea from the various ports or harbours. What further complicates the search for a matching deceased person is the fact that a civil war has been raging in Lebanon for many years, with consequent breakdown of law-enforcement institutions. During this period the authorities might not have investigated such a murder. Hence this case has basically proved unverifiable.

Nevertheless, the case shows some interesting features, apart from alleged memories: in particular, the deep emotional involvement of Nadine, how she acts out her memories in play, and perhaps especially how her memories lead to a physiological effect, as when her throat gets red and swollen when she shares those memories. Unsolved cases can have quite interesting features.

Statements by Sasha are few and there is some correspondence with Sana, the alleged previous personality. However, Sasha’s family were related to Sana and the circumstances of her death were well known in the community in
which they lived. Therefore no assumption of a paranormal process is required to explain the case, as was exemplified by Sana's mother, who rejected Sasha. From the point of view of Sasha's parents, who know the case best and observed it develop, there is sufficient evidence to accept the case as evidential, whereas for outsiders there is not sufficient evidence.

We started with three children who were speaking about a previous life. After a thorough investigation we are left with two cases, those of Wael Kiwan and Sasha Chehayeb, that would fall into the category of a 'solved' case seen from the perspective of the investigators, where the majority of the statements fit. However, in the case of Sasha the present and alleged previous family were related, so the evidential value of that case can be considered to be very slight.

Still the question remains, is the high correspondence, or 'good fit' with several highly specific statements, due to chance? Unfortunately we lack knowledge of the basic probability of each statement's being true, to enable us to calculate the odds against chance for each case by statistical analysis. Hence we are left with a subjective assessment that we invite the reader to ponder.

Cases of the reincarnation type often have other puzzling features besides the alleged memories. These three cases, though not necessarily extremely strong cases, exhibit some of these features. These can be physiological effects, as in the case of Nadine, or in some cases birthmarks or birth defects (Haraldsson, 2000a, 2000b; Stevenson, 1997a, 1997b), and perhaps also a deep emotional involvement, and expression of the apparent memories in play, as in the case of Nadine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A grant from the Bial Foundation in Portugal is gratefully acknowledged. We would also like to express our thanks to the families of the children of this project, and to Ian Stevenson and Dawn Hunt at the University of Virginia, and an anonymous referee, for thoughtful comments on a draft of this paper.

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