

## What if the Nakba did not happen? An autobiography that did not happen

**Ziad Khadash**

I think that this university has contributed to my tolerant cultural formation, my enlightened democratic thinking and my feeling of the universality of literature and the humanity of culture.

After graduation in 1989, I was appointed as an Arabic language teacher in the Yazour village near Jaffa.

During my work, I continued to write short stories and I published two collections of stories; the first was in 1990 and it was printed by the al-Nasr Printing House in Jaffa, while the second collection was published in 1992 and printed by the National Printing Press also in Jaffa.

I participated in many international cultural festivals in the early 1990s and this was a very fertile period during which my questions, obsessions, creative dreams, and my passion grow.

The travel was through the Lod International Airport, an old airport established in 1936 under British Mandate initiated by Yusuf Uwaida and his brothers Umran and Fayed, who were Palestinian businessmen.

In the summer of the second year of my work as a teacher at the Yazour school, I married my girlfriend Shoshana Adri, a Jewish Palestinian poet, whom I had met during my university years in the Hamra Cinema in Jaffa, where we attended, together with hundreds of Palestinians and Arabs, a pleasant singing concert for the Syrian singer Mayada al-Henawi.

The decision to marry a Jewish lady was a big problem for my family and hers because she is from a different religion, but our determination and the strength of our love made our parents give in to our love.

In 1997, I was appointed as a journalist and worked

as a writer of a literary weekly column in the famous Palestine Newspaper; its chief editor was Issa al-Issa and his brother Yousef al-Issa.

In this newspaper, I started a new cultural life which gave me the experience that had benefitted me later in developing my writings. In 2000, I left the Yazour School, and moved to the Frere School in Jaffa, and I was in constant contact with my family in Beit Nabala village, which was invaded by modernity changing many of its rural landmarks.

During that time, my mother was fiercely struggling with her disease in the al-Dajani Hospital in Jaffa. My father, the big farmer and the owner of many orchards was getting older after living a dynamic, vital and socially and economically productive life. He and his Jewish partner Omran al-Qamhi were responsible for transporting oranges, lemon and citrus to the Jaffa port in preparation for exportation to Europe. I continued to communicate with my teachers who taught me during the different school stages, including my great chemistry teacher Thabit al-Khalidi, who lived in al-Manshiyya in Jaffa, and I often visited him with my friends and colleagues.

The Ouja River in Jaffa was one of the places I was never bored visiting. It was my source of visual, intellectual, mental and human richness.

It was clearly reflected in my linguistic experience as this river had always been the scene of many events and creative, innovative and drama characters of my novels and stories...

The popular cafés in Jaffa, which I loved so much and where I used to sit, contemplate and write, such as the Abu Shakosh coffee shop and the al-Madfaa (cannon) coffee shop, have all unfortunately disappeared by modernity and they were replaced by young peoples'

cafés, which rely on ready-made foods and Western drinks!

I am not against modernity, but I am against the extinction of noble and intimate values and behaviors in social relations.

All this appear in my stories in the form of a conflict between the old and the modern and the confusion between them. I sometimes draw a strange picture in my conscious of life, that mixes the old and modern in an attempt to gain the benefits of modernity and the values of the beautiful past...

Libraries had a major role in shaping my cultural awareness in the city of Jaffa.

The most important libraries that were bringing novels and stories from abroad were al-Safari Library, the Palestine Scientific Library, and the al-Taher Library.

I have read from these libraries hundreds of novels and stories written by Arab and international writers such as, Edwar al-Kharrat, an Egyptian writer, Henry Meller, an American writer, Marquez, a Colombian writer, Alberto Moravia, an Italian writer, and Hermann Hesse, a German writer.

It is clear that I was a very lucky person because I lived and I am still living in the Jaffa city, a city open to the world and was nicknamed the "Mother of Strangers". It is an economically and industrially prosperous city and it was a cultural edifice for many Arab writers and international artists.

My relationship with the political authority in my country is characterized by tension and disharmony. And the reality is that no artist can admire any political authority or any non-political authority. Artists are natural-born to complain and be dissatisfied.

The political law in my country is based on free elections. Any Palestinian, regardless of his religion, his sect, can run for the elections and can vote. There is a Jewish minister of exterior, a Christian minister of interior and a Muslim prime minister. This is all good, but unfortunately, financial corruption, similar to what is present in other Arab brotherly countries, is festering within the Arab political system.

This obliges me, as a writer and together with my colleagues in the world of writing, to resist this corruption and expose it. There are also repressive practices by political parties in my country when they

reach power although it is claimed that the judiciary is independent and that there is a free legislative life in the country.

The Palestinian parties' officials rely on their glorious past to gain legitimacy. Most of them were freedom fighters and politicians who contributed a lot to the war against the Zionist gangs, which had tried to control Palestine claiming that this land is theirs and thanks God, the Zionists were defeated. This legitimacy, based on their struggle, gave these leaders the cover to deviate and to be corrupt.

All this is considered a challenge and a source of indignation among the Palestinian writers and artists and a reason to take honorable and conscious stances to fight the imbalance and expose it to people.

Until now, I have published twenty books: novels, stories, cultural and pedagogical critics and I signed many of these books in the Arab Club Theater. A number of my books have been translated to many foreign languages and I am still living in Jaffa or "Mother of Strangers" as they call it for its tolerance, the love it shows to its visitors and its openness to everything new in the world. I got my PhD from the University of Gaza and a year ago I became a writing professor at the Haifa University. I'm still there; I write and read and enjoy being from a great country called Palestine.

But Palestine, which I loved and which I gave it all my passion, was similar to other countries; it has angels and it has killers; it has ugliness and it has beauty and this is similar to any other country in the world. I was sitting on the sidewalk of the Abu al-Afiyah restaurant in Jaffa and we were resting from the trouble of lengthy discussions about uniting the union of Arab writers. I did not expect that the response will be in the form of a bullet to be fired by a masked man riding a bicycle; a bullet to hit my head and penetrate my skull.

I thought they would shoot at my house or maybe they would kick me hard in the street. My crime was my novel entitled: Jonoun al-Nawafeth (The Madness of Windows) published a year ago and which sparked many reactions. There were those who admired it and there were those who were angered by it. Those who love it, considered it the first courageous Palestinian novel tackling our sensational life as we live it. Those who were angered by it, considered it an insult to public morals, a danger to the young generation, and claimed that it encourages immorality and calls for debauchery.

I fell to the ground in blood and books. I was very sad for my end, which I did not deserve. I am now under the soil and my body is rapidly decomposing, but my thoughts are still shining and spreading and this makes me victorious in the holy cause of freedom of thought and expression.

In all Palestine, there were violent marches denouncing my assassination and demanding trials for the enemies of freedom. The most beautiful thing is that many schools and institutions now carry my name and a new literary prize was also introduced carrying my name. All this has made my soul rest.

The issue of freedom of thought and expression, which is the most important issue facing Palestine today, triumphs when people join together and when they know that the progress of peoples depends on their freedom of thought .

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung is one of the major institutions of political education in the Federal Republic of Germany. It serves as a forum for debate and critical thinking about political alternatives, as well as a research center for progressive social development. It is closely affiliated to the German Left Party (DIE LINKE). The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung has supported partners in Palestine since 2000, and established the Regional Office in Ramallah in 2008.

Today, the office is in charge of project cooperation with partners in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip as well as in Jordan. Rosa PAPERS is a collection of analyses and relevant viewpoints irregularly published by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine & Jordan. The content of Rosa Papers is the sole responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the position of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine & Jordan.

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