

Salman Natour, *"What is left of Haifa"*,

Wa ma nasina (We have not forgotten),

Al-Jadid, December 1980

Salman Natour

On April 1948 Haifa fell

Thus spoke the age scared man

The age scared man that we speak of, walks hand in hand with the years of this century, they progress, and he regresses, staggering sorrowfully and painfully. He awakes with the sun. Leaves the house, and walks the streets of Haifa: Yud-Lamed Perets, Ha-Nevi'im, Mandale Mokher Sfarim, Abraham Avino, Sarah Imenu, names which he finds hard to pronounce and streets which he finds even harder to walk. He looks for a sitting place in a park, Jewish friends gather around him. When he was a coachman, going to and fro around Haifa, these friends were building castles in Baghdad and Alexandria, and their children studied in the best of schools to establish Immigration recruiting offices later.

We say: "the war of the 14" (World War One). he says: "I was 14 then"... we say: "the Nakbeh", he says: "I was 48" and adds: "I witnessed it at the day when their cannon was on the bridge, and they dropped a bomb full of yellow on the clock near the Jarini mosque, so the clock fell, and I said: the clock fell, and the homeland will follow... so I went to look after my partner, Abraham Shmido, but the bastard had sold the warehouse and the partnership already."

"The Hadar neighborhood was full of vineyards then, owned by the Khamra, Salam, and Huwash families, but a representative from the Keren Kayemet, which had an office at Stanton street, bought them, and bought Tal Issamak and the Azazia and gave them to the Jews. They were assisted by Brumza - a district court judge. The Jews started to open offices and buying the country, and all the mediators and landowners sold whatever they could. The baron even bought Zamarin, and the German district, which was owned by the Germans since the time of the Turks, since the Kaiser of Germany, Gallion (Wilhelm Gallion), came and saw the harbor. The minute he arrived he offered to buy fields from the Acre municipality and gave them to the Germans who preceded him to the Holy Land. So the townspeople came and started measuring the fields with ropes. Afterwards, he took George Susse' carriage and went to Jerusalem.

The Germans worked as farmers and carters, just like us, but then the road to Jerusalem was opened so their wives took upon themselves to drive the coaches and to transport tourists. They started moving to the Carmel; one was Kiler, then came Shnider and the sister nuns, and they bought Um el-Amed and Bethlehem from Alfred Tuweeni and sold it to Musa Khankin, who worked for the Keren Kayemet.

We, the poor people, didn't understand how the land was disappearing on us, but whenever the poor raised their voices in question they would be oppressed by their superiors. One of my neighbors in the Church district was the sheikh Ezz-Iddeen alQasem, originally from Lattakia. He was a poor, but zealous man, he used to oversee my wellbeing... you see, I used to drink. Anyway, all the other sheikhs used to oppose him: Alhaj Khalil, Hasan Bek, Ibrahim Bek, Sliman Sallah Bek, and Alhaj Abdullah, the whole lot. And why? Because he was poor and a warmonger who wanted to free the country. Going around with his poor farmer friends, who didn't belong anywhere. Woe, to us the poor. But then he was killed by the British: him and his followers were ambushed at Yaa'bod, the poor sod was true to his company. The Bashas had no remorse. Hell, the lot of them: scammers and thieves, one would sell his own mother for a penny. Before the Jews took over the country - I had a Jewish friend, one Dahud Cohen, he used to work for Ahronson - one day he called for me, and asked if I haven't heard that they have taken over the land, and told me to bring my children to Zamarin."

The age scared man told us about Sahat el-Hantir, "it was like the taxi station today. All the carts and carriages stood there waiting/ if one would, for example want to go to the El-Mahatta district he would pay ten pens for the ride, or to go to Um Ijmal, to the Kharbieh, Yaghur, elMarah, Birkieh, he would take a ride with us".

The Khadder was mentioned, so his wife said she would tell us the following story:

"Once we were at the Khadder, and we had visitors from all around the country, after they feasted and drank gallons of araq, and started to fuss around, so they went down to the beach. As soon as they went in they started drown after all the liqueur. And all the people ashore began to panic and to scream, some had their husbands drowning, some their brothers, and the poor old women began to plead: "Please Khadder, save them, O Khadder!"

Suddenly, they saw someone coming on a boat. He began picking the drowning people and bringing them ashore. Coming to and fro, I swear it must have been five or six times. Then he disappeared and they couldn't find any trace of the savior. It was like the sea had swallowed him. And the people started saying, "it was the Khadder, no one drowned" then they sang and feasted again, that very day no one slept. It was a night to remember"

The man didn't let her continue the tale and said: "the Khadder is alive, yes indeed!"

There was a cave there, then came Asaad elKhadder and built around it some beautiful building with a view on the beach. But none of those who had visited that holy place had ever imagined that the news about the Der Yasin massacre would arrive Haifa.

"We were lost, not knowing what to do, the British and the Jews and our own sheikhs kept oppressing us, like pawn we did their bidding. And although they tried to force upon us to like the Elhaj Amin, and proclaimed him defender of the faith, none abided him.

It was April in the year 1948, at the nineteenth of this spring month Haifa fell... the British were preparing for their departure, and after they have gave all their weapons to the Hagana troops. This city which its commerce had thrived throughout the years. But as soon as the first news came about Der Yasin, in which it was told that bellies of pregnant women were cut and children were slaughtered, then they dragged the corpses to Bab eSahira. The British and the Arab radio stations broadcasted horror scenarios telling about what the Jews will do with the Arabs who will stay at their homes. They shot artillery from atop the bridge, and the Jews ran for shelter in the Hadar neighborhood. So the Arabs were kept under constant bombardment. There were some who proclaimed encouragements for the Arabs to stay at their houses, and not to abandon the homeland. And on the meanwhile, a bomb was dropped on the El-Mahatta district and at the clock plaza, which resembled the Big-Ben, and a barrel – filled with gunpowder – was hurled down the stairs leading down to Wadi-eNisnas, and then another one, and another... Then the Hagana troops started clearing out the houses off their residents. The British would patrol the houses and if they saw the dwellers still sitting there, they would frighten them by saying "what are you doing here? If the Jews would find you here they would kill you. Take your belongings and go to the harbor". Those bastard Brits had tricked us. On one hand they told us they were on our side but on the other hand they didn't leave a weapon which they did not give to Jews, not to mention that they helped them to chase us away. Every Arab they saw they took to the boats. Gathered all the Arabs at the harbor beyond the point of no return. So the boats took those horrorstruck people to Sidon and to Tyre. Understand that whoever left, left in such a hurry that the cooking stayed on the gas, the bread was still in the oven. The market was left unattended, so cars would pull in and haul anything they could: they took everything, from food to electrical appliances. They even demolished new buildings for the metal and rock. My wife, my children and I hid at the Kalaawi residence. I swore that even if they killed me and my children I would not leave this place. We were sending the smallest child to watch for the arrival of the King Abdullah's army which he promised us with; he would recognize them buy their hats. No hats and no army. We and those on the boats were done for. After two days I went back to my house, and found it empty. I swear I saw him with my own eyes; an Ashkenazi old man emptied the house clear except our IDs. I told myself:" at least you still have your children's names"

Haifa was not erased from the face of the country, but it has changed tremendously. An old Haifa and a new one, one known by us and one known by those who lived at the time of the E-Sharkia gate and the Shuwam market, the Bandar E-Tuggar district, and the Qishli. Many years have passed, and many events had come to pass, but memory slowly fades and dissipates. These painful memories, these images which seep deep into the one's soul and pinch any empathic heart, raise a question: What does the age scared man expects as he waits the hour of judgment? Maybe to tell god "we were denied the joys of life, we were separated, and torn from each other and disgraced our children"

How can we write everything about Haifa? So we wrote a little of the little, of that which the age scared man was able to impart to us. The ruins of the Jarini mosque or the Basha's baths upon which pieces of glass would glitter at dawn to play tricks of light on the marble statue of Faisal, which was erected upon the resting place of the sheikh Mubarak.

"The people of old Haifa were mostly fishermen and stone workers. They used to take the stones from Wadi Rushmia and sell them. And when the British came and expanded the harbor, we started to work there as well. Rifaat, was a honed fisherman, he had a black donkey which he used to stand upon and look to the sea, and see where the fish gather, then he would throw in his net, and not miss even a single fish. Time passes by, and the sea began to bring people and to send people away. And Abu Zeid's boats took the Arabs away...

Where to?

To Acre

To Beirut

To Sidon

Where? To the bloody hell..."

Translated by Sohil Swid