

Note from the editors: This is a direct translation from the Arabic original. The final copy-edited version will be available on November 29th, 2016.

Habash, George. *al-Thawriyūn La Yamūtūn Abadan.* Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 2009. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution.*¹

Chapter II: The foundations of Arab Nationalism (1951 – 1961)

Following the 1948 defeat, you devoted the bulk of your efforts to developing an Arab nationalism that, in your opinion, had to be aimed at easing the recovery of Palestine. In 1951, why did you leave Beirut for Jordan?

On account of my activities, which were considered unacceptable, the American University of Beirut (AUB) wanted nothing more to do with me. The “Solid Link” (al-Urwa al-Wuthqa) society was gaining influence in the Arab world. On the fringes of our public manifestations, we developed underground activities. In 1949, young patriots had developed a clandestine group in Syria, charged with liquidating Arab leaders who had done nothing to help Palestinians in the previous year. The ‘Brigades of Sacrifice’ (Kataeb al-Fida) were supposed to assassinate ‘traitors’ and undermine ‘imperialist interests’ in the region. I was part of these brigades, from a distance. We established a list of operations to be undertaken. But on 12 October 1950, the Syrian authorities uncovered the ‘Brigades’ after one member, an Egyptian named Hussein Toufic, was accused of planning an attempt on the life of Adib al-Shishakli, who presided over the Supreme Military Council.

I hid out at my friend Mounir Seno’s house for the duration of the inquest. He lived in the Basta neighbourhood of Beirut, and helped us purchase arms. I was not implicated in the police investigation, so I was able to return to my university studies. In spite of my absence, and my being the object of this police chase, I succeeded in obtaining my diploma. In the shadows, the ‘Brigades of Sacrifice’ were preparing us for revolutionary action. Our enthusiasm mounted, and we proceeded to the next stage: the creation of a real party.

In the meantime, especially when Waddie Haddad and Ahmed Khatib were involved, our meetings sought to generate Arab unity around the Palestinian

¹ This work is made available under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, and must be used accordingly. Please see citation guidelines on the About Us page.

tragedy. This was the only thing that mattered to me. The dean of the faculty of medicine, Dr Gantous, was encouraging me to teach. He was convinced that medicine was my vocation, and didn't realise that my political activities had gained the upper hand.

One day, a manifestation we organised on campus against British colonialist schemes took a turn for the worse. The administration wanted to shut it down. They threatened us. They called in security forces, which surrounded the university. There were padlocked chains on the doors of the faculty of medicine to prevent protesters from leaving the campus. As a histology assistant (studying microscopic tissue structures), I should not have participated, but at the last minute I decided to lead this protest march. We broke the chains by force, while outside other students were coming to swell the ranks of the demonstration, which was severely repressed.

I was arrested, along with Waddie Haddad and other members of the 'Solid Link'. But the following day, the Lebanese newspapers devoted their headlines to our cause, and a media campaign compelled the authorities to release us two or three days later. It was a great victory, which I would like to attribute in large part to the Syrian student Asma al-Moukaa, who played a very active role on our side, something that was uncommon for a woman at the time. But I had crossed the Rubicon; I could no longer work at the university. We had to settle on a new safe haven. Together with Waddie Haddad, we hesitated between Jerusalem and Amman, before opting for Jordan, where my family had taken refuge after the catastrophe. My core 'Solid Link' colleagues dispersed: Ahmed Khatib went to Kuwait, Hani al-Hindi to Syria. Saleh Shebel stayed in Lebanon. As for Hamed Jbouri, he headed for Iraq. We wanted to have leaders in every country where we intended to develop the militant network of the Movement of Arab Nationalists, which we founded shortly before our arrival in Amman.

Who were the main founders of the MAN?

I created the Movement of Arab Nationalists in 1951, by setting up a collective leadership of six students from the American University of Beirut: myself, Waddie Haddad, a Kuwaiti, Ahmed al-Khatib, a Syrian, Hani al-Hindi, a Lebanese, Saleh Shebel, and an Iraqi, Hamed Jbouri.

Drawing lessons from the defeat of 1948, the fundamental principal of our party was grounded in Arab unity, the sine qua non of a resolution to the Palestinian problem, as our slogan – "Unity, Liberation, Vengeance" – explicitly indicated. Dr Constantine Zurayk was our spiritual father. His book

on the *Nakba* showed us the path to follow to recover our right of return. The struggle, according to him, should be not only military but also cultural, and thereby intimately linked to the Arab unity we intended to generate.

During this period, to comply with the wishes of a certain number of comrades, we opened a dialogue with the other elements of Arab nationalism, notably the Baathists. 'Why not join the Baath party?' these comrades asked.

I would like to draw attention to an essential point: we reckoned on a very strong dialectical relationship between the liberation of Palestine and Arab unity. In our eyes, the Zionist project was a colonialist project that, beyond Palestine, targeted the entire Arab nation. We therefore had to confront it with a global project of unity, the primary objective of which was the liberation of Palestine, the matrix of all our woes. Now, the Baath party was far from making this liberation a priority. I had read the work of their theorist, Michel Aflaq. I spoke with him at length in Beirut. I had listened to his responses to my queries. But I kept coming back to the same question: why wasn't the liberation of Palestine a priority, in his writing? Besides, we regretted that military training was not a Baathist priority. Their *modus operandi* also diverged from ours: every member of the MAN had to concur with revolutionary action and be prepared to sacrifice himself or herself should the party ask them to do so. This had to take precedence over personal choices, as one of our principles stipulated: "Execute, then dispute later". This distinction would later attract many Baathists, who were disappointed with their party's position on Palestine.

Our difference with the communists, another branch of Arab nationalism at the time, concerned the partition plan for Palestine. They defended the partition plan in accordance with the party line set out by Moscow, one of the first capitals to recognise the new state of Israel in 1948. During this period, I was not convinced, moreover, of the benefits of the communist doctrine.

Therefore, the Movement of Arab Nationalists did not endorse rapprochement with other groups. On the contrary, all these discussions reinforced our drive to consolidate our own party.

But this party, had we to officially proclaim it, or, conversely, maintain a degree of opacity about its activities? It would be difficult to settle this matter between us. Ultimately, we decided that the MAN should not go public until it had established its theoretical and organisational foundations. But at the same time, we had to translate our speech into action. Hence began our semi-secret, semi-public work in Jordan from 1952 onwards.

الثورة الفلسطينية

The Palestinian Revolution