

What use is it to weep  
When you have lost everything  
And thus can lose no more?  
So, wipe your tears,  
and let us, together, walk along  
Towards a horizon smiling with hope.

Let us scatter shining stars  
Over our people's procession to red freedom:  
Our homeland, brother, is never lost  
So long as we keep it in our hearts.  
So, wipe your tears  
And let us, together, walk along.

Al Karmi's greater poems, however, are to appear *after* the *nakbah*, and are therefore beyond the time scope of this series. Extolling the beauty of Palestine, and asserting the meaninglessness of life without a homeland to live in, love and belong to, these are masterpieces of patriotic poetry, charged with sweet lyricism and enchanting imagery.

Of the other Palestinian poets of this period, mention must be made of: Abdul Rahim Mahmud, whom we considered in the previous article, and who was perhaps the most powerful and militant voice in both periods; Sa'id Al Issa, the ardent advocate of Christian-Muslim cohesiveness who, though a devoted Christian, extolled, as perhaps very few Muslim poets have ever done, the greatness of the prophet Mohamed and Islam; Mahmud Salim Al Hoot, author of *Arab Epics*, which consists of five epics on five landmarks in Arab history, including the *nakbah*; Ali Hashem Rasheed, author of *Songs of Return*, the Gaza poet whose sweet lyrics on the *nakbah* and the theme of return are studied in many schools throughout the Arab world; Kamal Nasser (1925-74), the militant poet and PLO leader who was assassinated in Beirut by Israeli agents; and, finally, Mahmud Nadim Al Afghani, who is often called the Poet of Palestine's Youth.

### 1939-48: The Prose

Just as Fadwa Tukan's loss of her brother stamped both her life and poetry with sadness, so did the death of Sultana, Khalil Al Sakakini's beloved wife, plunge the once happy and optimistic writer into a fathomless pool of bitterness and despair. In both cases, moreover, intolerable personal loss coincided with a historic national disaster, the *nakbah*. Likewise, just as Fadwa sang the saddest songs in pre-*nakbah* poetry, so were Al Sakakini's writings the clearest and strongest prose expression of the despair that engulfed the nation on the eve of the *nakbah*. In short, while the former told the story in poetry, the latter told it in prose.

Of his grief for his wife's sudden and untimely death, Al Sakakini writes:

Your death, O Sultana, has caused me a heartache that neither tears, nor endurance, nor patience, nor work, nor reading, nor talking, nor sleep, nor the passage of days, can relieve. My eyes have lost interest in all sights; my ears, in all sounds.

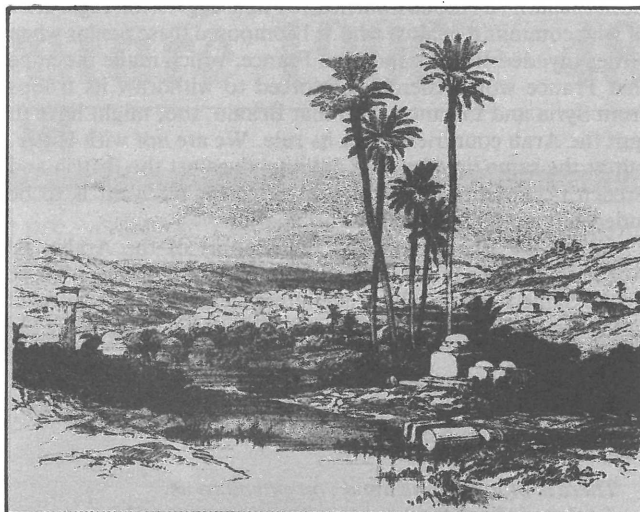
Were it not for my bashfulness, I would shun all company, shutting myself up in my room, where I can freely whisper to you and weep for you. Wherever I go or turn, your memory arrests me: Your image fills my eyes; your name, my mouth; your sweet voice, my ears. Who says you are absent from me?

I used to believe that I loved life, but now I realize that it was *you*, rather than life, that I truly loved; for with your departure, life has become quite worthless to me.

Thus, his sorrow was so great that he couldn't help projecting it onto his very conception of life:

What is this life, carrying us over from childhood to old age, from health to illness, from hope to despair, from joy to sorrow, and from life to death? The first day in your life is the first step to your death.

If death is a fearful thing, then we had better fear its bringer - life. Would it not be better if there was no life at all, as this would be the only way to escape death? My fellow human beings, come, let us all die out!



Jenin, pre - 1948 Palestine

In his post-*nakbah* writings, however, this extremely pessimistic and nihilistic speculation gives way to a more carefully contemplated kind of pessimism. But to the last day of his life, his motto remained, «Life is vain; let's die out!»

The most outstanding prose writer of this period is perhaps Dr. Isaac Al Hussein, whose rational optimism seems to counterbalance, and even outweigh, Al Sakakini's speculative pessimism. He wrote twelve books, four of which fall within the scope of this article, namely, *Orientalists in England*, *A Hen's Memoir*, *Return of the Ship* and *Are Poets Mortals*?

In his preface to *Return of the Ship*, he remarks, «We believe that no nation is more competent than another; that each nation can, under favorable conditions, contribute its full share to civilization and progress.» Referring to the hardships suffered by the Palestinian people in their seemingly desperate battle against Zionism, he expounds his doctrine of optimism thus:

Hardships are to nations what storms are to ships, in that they awaken the consciousness, and stimulate the strength, cooperation and solidarity of the people. If their consciousness is fully raised, and their strength, cooperation and solidarity fully exercised, they will either overcome their hardships or, at least, be on the right path to overcome them. If this is optimism, then optimism is our choice.

The least that can be said of this doctrine is that it is useful and never harmful, whereas pessimism is harmful and never useful. No doubt, it is far more useful for the people boarding a ship in danger to do all they can to drive death away, than to sit sad and idle waiting for it or, worse, trying to convince themselves that death is not very bad after all!

On the individual's relationship with the community, he addresses an audience of high school graduates as follows:

The first thing to know is that the interests of the community are prior to those of the individual; that the individual ought to respect the values and contribute to the welfare of the community.

There are those who view themselves as giants and all others as dwarfs or ghosts, who would fight as lions when their personal rights or interests are threatened, but would shrink into extremely mild cats when the interests of their community are in danger.

For centuries we have been living with this moral being - the community - absent or unheeded. Our social system has been seriously defective, stressing personal rights and ignoring social duties.

Of women's right to freedom and dignity, he writes in *Return of the Ship*:

Our nation can never hope to meet success, nor can our ship reach the shore safely, unless the woman is enabled to exercise her full rights, unless her problems are addressed with due understanding and respect for her. Those who are reluctant to give her the understanding and respect that she truly deserves, need only know what our language «knew» long ago, when it stressed the correlation between woman and nation.