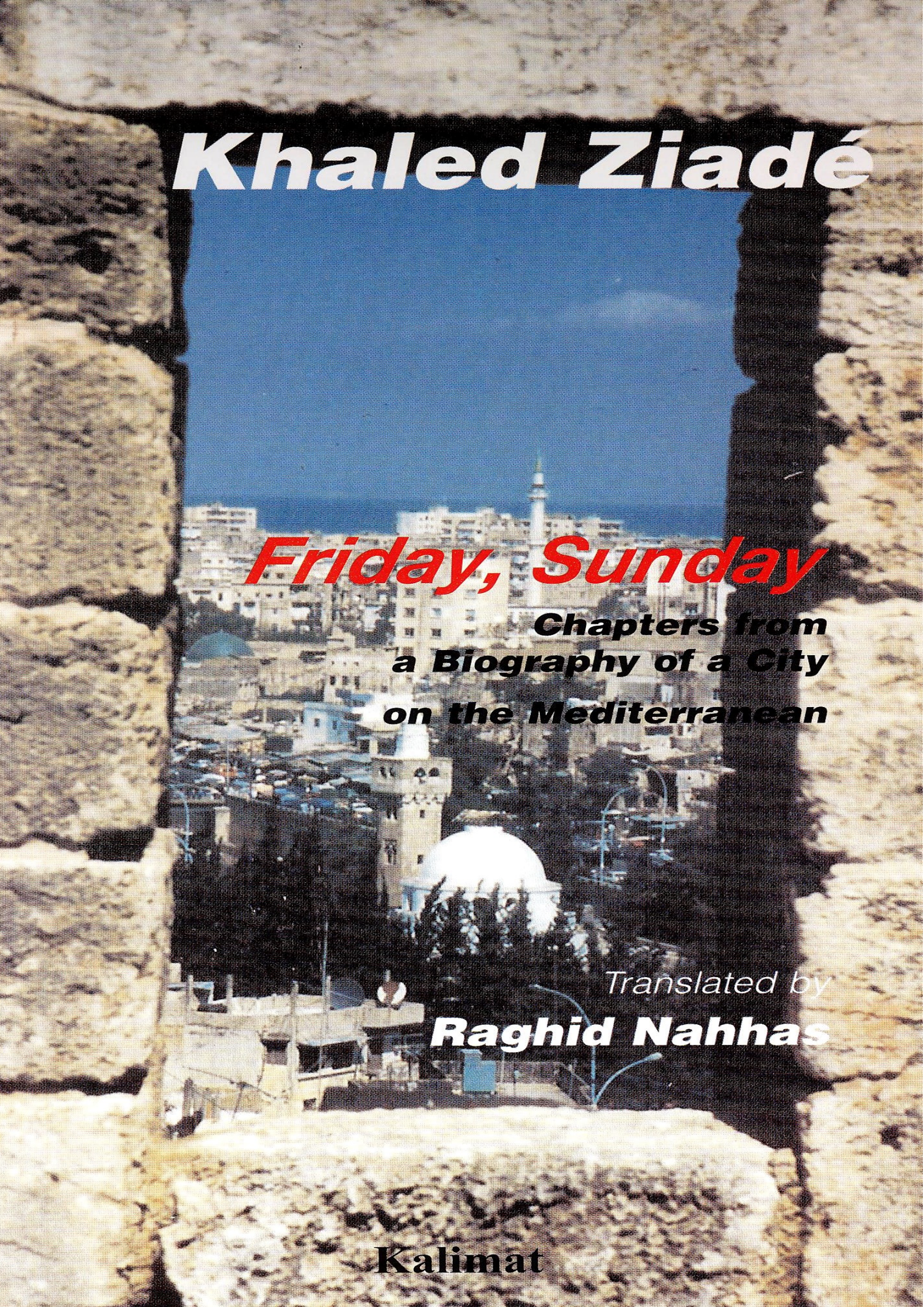
Khaled Ziadé



Friday, Sunday

Chapters from a Biography of a City on the Mediterranean

Translated by

Raghid Nahhas

Kalimat

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Contents

My Affinity with Khalid Ziadé—
A Translator's Perspective

What attracted me most to translating this work is the *personal presence* in some of the lines Khalid Ziadé moulds out of very simple words to describe his generation's life-long history in Tripoli, his Mediterranean birthplace.

The reason this *personal presence* appeals to me *may* be that I belong to the same generation and I was born in Damascus, Syria. The populations of both cities share many traditions and values, but one important difference between Tripoli and Damascus is the interaction between city and State. Damascus is predominantly a Moslem city, and the capital of a predominantly Moslem country. Tripoli, on the other hand, is predominantly a Moslem city in a country controlled by Maronite Christians, although composed of sectarian populations of comparable numbers, mainly Maronites, other Christians, Sunni Moslems, Shiite Moslems and Druze.

In his narrative about city and State, Ziadé touches on the sensitive issue of the aspirations of his city conflicting with those of the State, but mirroring the predominant aspirations of the Arabs (in any Arab State) at the time, namely their strong affiliation with Arab nationalism. Politics has always been inseparable from the cultural norms of Arab families.

Ziadé informs us how his generation defined itself during a culturally vibrant era in the history of the Middle East as it starts to face the 1960s, a period of great cultural significance to the whole world.

Ziadé might well be talking about himself throughout the book, but this is not his biography. On some occasions, I felt he was talking about me, my father, my friends, our home, our lane in the old quarter of Damascus where narrow arched paths

connected homes with internal open yards, and our new home in a multi-story building in one of the modern quarters of the city to which we made a transition in the nineteen sixties.

Ziadé's concern for the human aspects of civilisation is matched by his concern for its architectural manifestations. Although not articulated in a literary or philosophical fashion, he has a deep sense of the "dwelling" as a focal point of activity and enjoyment. This is very appealing to me.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Damian Boyle, Manfred Jurgensen, Sophie Masson, Bruce Pascoe, Eva Sallis and L.E. Scott who, in their capacity as advisers to *Kalimat*, reviewed various parts of my translation as it was serialised in *Kalimat* between 2000 and 2003.

Raghid Nahhas

The footnotes throughout this book are the translator's.

Prelude

There is a city on the eastern Mediterranean that used to be influenced by the interactions among the different parts of the Mediterranean, sometimes silently and at other times with violent noise.

We were young then, when the inhabitants of the city seemed as if they were moving fast away from the old quarters to the west side, where buildings crept among the citrus orchards that surrounded the city.

I have always been preoccupied with the implications of such a move that did not lack mutilation and destruction of the Old City and its architecture. I had assumed that the mutilation only touched old buildings and past heritage, until I discovered, a few years ago, that these destructive processes did not spare some more recent buildings considered symbols of modernism. When the last three colonial landmarks were destroyed, I realised that dealing with this matter was not going to be fulfilled by mere historical or sociological analysis, but it was important to address the perspectives of architecture and heritage. I, therefore, revisited my own experience in my own environment where I was brought up, among people who shared their living with me. I excavated among the remains of my memory in order to follow up my special relationship with those landmarks and places that formed my world of childhood and youth.

The present work is not an attempt to write an autobiography, document realities or resurrect norms long gone. Rather, it is an attempt to write the biography of places during times of their splendour

and demise, as I lived them. I have attempted to write sections of a biography of changing times. What stimulated my desire to write these sections, or let us say scenes, was the intimate relationship that existed between places and times. Olden times that disappeared after their places had been run down by age.

The passage of time leaves deep fingerprints on places in that civic medium where the pull between the traditional old and that of the *other* new reside side by side. This is a matter that does not lack symbolic violence before it changes into an open conflict. The time during which things coexisted in apparent peace has long passed. This was a happy era between the nineteen fifties and sixties. A happiness made by the world of our early childhood, our first acquaintance with school. It used to flow fast, changing places that were tossed from the eastern side of the city towards the west.

The matter does not relate to facts narrated by a historian, connecting them by a causal relationship. It does not relate to nostalgia about youth, customs or rituals of those times absorbed by age. It is, therefore, of concern that one might fall into the profession of a historian or a writer of antiquities.

A greater concern is that writing might change into an autobiography. But this is not an autobiography as much as it is a group of landmarks in the memory of a generation, and sections from the biography of a city.

It is the biography of varied places, characterised by consecutive times, as if times become shadows that cannot be erased, particularly during holidays of festivities and on Fridays and Sundays.[1]

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[1] It was customary for Christians to close their business on Sundays and Moslems on Fridays for the one-day weekend in Lebanon. (Actually, the weekend would start in the afternoon of

Let us say that it is a story of a city at a specified period of time, with one of its sides sitting on the eastern Mediterranean, whilst another dwells inside an internal old history, a few hundred years back, carried by civilisation of sandstones, minarets and narrow lanes that stood up for all types exchanged by the shores of the Mediterranean early in the century.

It is the biography of civilisation: buildings, streets, districts, men and ideas. It is the story of pictures hanging by twine across the streets, or pasted on their walls.

In the narrow space of memories that proves difficult for analysis to comprehend, exists a possibility for literary approaches that could be akin to mythology, and could gather the fragments of places that are a mere reflection of the shrapnel of memory.

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the day before in each case. Government and public offices used to close on Sundays.)

A Biography of A Civilisation

For a long time, I have been searching within myself for the secret of the overwhelming joy that befell me when my parents were upgrading some of our home furniture. There was no real need for that, but the matter was more related to a change in living style.

There was some desire to change some pieces for others: the grand copper bed for beds of a cheap metal and lesser heights off the floor. The tough hand-painted wooden tables for others made of Formica based on metallic legs. The three-mirrored wardrobe was removed in favour of another simpler one devoid of mirrors. This was accompanied by getting rid of some kitchen utensils, copper ones were replaced by aluminium, hand-made bamboo chairs by mass-fabricated leather chairs. To a degree, this was a situation similar to moving from the Copper Age to the Age of Formica and Aluminium. It was the age of change from coal to electricity. The coal-heated iron and the coal winter-stove gave way to the electric iron and heater.

There was a degree of pride and ostentation in possessing these items and instruments, for they were things that others did not possess yet. Whatever was considered a must to go was sold quickly. I quite remember the broker who was in charge of moving those copper beds, huge wardrobes and other items to the weekly scrap market that contained a

collection of items sufficient to refurbish quite a number of homes.

This period, covering about three decades, seems to me a period of joy. There was a belief that things were moving to the better. I remember, when I was in my first years at school in the early sixties, that I felt no passion when those items of furniture left home. On the contrary, I was happier to see the new furniture coming. As a matter of fact, things were not limited to that, the situation now required a new arrangement for the geography of the walls. Coloured landscape pictures and photographs replaced family photos. The large frame with its ornament of hand crafted silk flowers was removed. Its place remained empty. All of that was only in preparation for moving houses to a newly established street: a wider, quieter and more serious street. This was a move from a single level, freestanding house to an upper floor apartment overlooking the sea that I could see from its windows.

From the balcony of our new home I could watch, as a boy, the buildings of the new huge Government House, the construction of the boulevard amidst the fields and the cutting of lemon trees from large orchard areas in preparation for building the Fair. Before the new buildings were able to obscure my view completely, I was able to count the ships that arrived daily to transport oil from the company whose constructions were not part of the same view.

I must mention that we did not stay in that apartment more than a few years. We later moved to a larger home, located further away from the old town. This entailed getting rid of more old domestic items, replacing them with newer ones. The new home was approximately located in the middle of the new town, at a time when terms such as 'modern'

and 'new' repeated themselves within the talks of the town.

Modernity was an affair practised daily, in one way or another, before the biography of modernity was written or read. During almost the same period, extensive removal of the veil and the fez occurred. This was the end of the fifties and the start of the sixties. The whole city, or most of its households moved from the inner streets that witnessed the birth of parents and grandparents, to new houses in districts with recently built streets.

It is possible for research, after the passage of all those years, to trace back the origins of this civic fever. It happened after 1958, and immediately following the 'revolution' that lasted four or five months, during which I was confined to home. The events at the time constituted a beginning for consciousness. They took place two or three years after the flood of the river that passed through the middle of the old Mameluke[2] city. I assume that there is no relationship between the flood of 1955 and the revolution of 1958.[3] Amidst the Arabism zeal, however, the city opted for ridding itself from a tradition that seemed too distant and too ancient. It was decided to demolish the houses that surrounded the river in order to widen its path, and build a corniche road along its sides. Houses, baths and streets six to eight centuries old were removed. The bulldozers that tore the middle of the town had become active. It was said that one such bulldozer

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[2] Pertaining to the Mamluks- originally slaves, then members of a military class who became the rulers of Egypt 1250-1517.

[3] 1958 is a year that witnessed the unity between Egypt and Syria under the reign of Gamal Abdunasser who was the utmost symbol of Arab nationalism in modern history. It is also a year when civil unrest (referred to as the "Revolution") between Christians and Moslems (more inclined towards Arab unity) flared in Lebanon.

malfunctioned because it hit the grave of a holy man. Planning spared the riverside mosque. Aside from that, the demolition operations did not attract any objection. During that period, building flourished on the hill overlooking the city, to where some citizens from the flood stricken district moved. Inhabitants of the inner city also moved to the hill. Buildings were particularly creeping towards the harbour along three routes, so that today the city buildings almost connect to the buildings on the harbour.

Writing a biography of a city involves profound dialectics, that would initially seem chaotic and destructive, implying as if modernisation can only be accomplished by taking revenge against the past. Truly, constructional modernisation can take its path ignoring the old, such as having the old city beside the modern one without conflict or wasting history, be it not for the fact that men themselves want to rid themselves of their selves. They, therefore, take revenge against their past, and they opt for hiding it, destroying it or eliminating it with contempt.

The age of modernisation in the city began over a century ago, towards the end of the Ottoman regulative period, during the rule of Medhat Pasha the *Wali*[4] of Syria in 1879. Medhat Pasha was saturated with modernising and constitutional ideas. During his brief governance, he paid many visits to the towns under his jurisdiction, providing advice to dignitaries to build new edifices in their cities. A public park and a mosque still stand in our city as a mark of his advice. The *Saraya*,[5] in *al-Tal*[6] district, dates back to the late Ottoman period. Opposite this building is the clock tower that was built in 1898, commemorating a quarter of a century of the reign of

[4] Governer.
[5] Government House.
[6] The Hill.

Sultan Abdul Hamid. Constructional modernisation was initially, however, not solely Ottoman. Europeans participated in it as well. Missionaries built several schools, mostly choosing areas outside the boundaries of the old city, at the boundaries, or in the Christian quarter and its surrounds. There were schools such as L'Azarette, Les Freres, and others for the Italians. This is in addition to the American and Russian schools in the City or its Harbour.

Al-Tal, where the park, the Government House and the Clock Tower were built, was a district attracting Ottoman modernisation, where a number of local notables were encouraged to build mansions in that area considered too desolate by most city inhabitants.

After 1908, and for a few years only, the Unionists spread a wave of modern ideas appropriate to their revolutionary principles. The Ottoman provincial governor built a straight road among the orchards, connecting the old city with the harbour. This road is still known by his name. Ironically, the street that was established along this straight line, is today the most modern of the city streets, with westernised shops spread along its sides whilst itself carrying the name of an Ottoman administrator. The provincial governor intended, had he had the time, on extending the straight road to penetrate the city up to the castle that lies on the hill overlooking the city. He also built, among other things, establishments such as a home for the aged.

The actual period of modernisation, however, is the period of The Mandate. The centre of power moved outside the old city. A centre for the city was built outside it: a European style public park near the Ottoman park, schools, police station, shops, hotels, night clubs, etc. They all took *al-Tal* and its surrounds as their place. *Al-Tal* became the core of

the modern city that extended towards the west and the northwest.

The modern city could have expanded on a large span of orchards without touching the old city, particularly that some modernists came from another space. Constructional modernisation is, however, a message addressed to the people of the city. They get embroiled in it, and they respond to it. It is inevitable that the new buildings must touch the old ones, because constructional modernism takes the forms of extension, spreading and expansion as if emanating from the old city. This is because it aims at liberating the old from its shackles. It is thus not possible for us to imagine a buffer zone between the two cities. On the contrary, there is an overlap, particularly when the new drives away the old. In the beginning, some old buildings are partially demolished, but it is the building of roads that is the predicament of the old city, particularly when it loses the ability to resist this change. Building roads is the product of the mentality of the straight line, the short distance between two points and the child of the age of the car (the automobile in those days). It is the process that eats up complete streets and leaves an ugly deformity in what remains of them. The first road that was built during the Mandate was over the shoulder of the city, penetrating it beside its great mosque from the southwest.

The modern city during the Mandate expanded and grew in three directions, except that of the old city. But this growth of the colonial city, if we can call it that, cannot be compared by what happened after the Mandate.

The Mandate almost left behind it a complete nucleus for modern civic life. As mentioned before, its formation started towards the end of the Ottoman regulative period. Indeed, new streets containing

buildings, residential buildings, government establishments, private schools, shops, hotels and cafés were built. The new scene did not lack industrial factories that were established in other districts of the city. The locals participated in this feat effectively. They were the material of modernisation, including country folks, Christians and Moslems, who were more enthusiastic about entering a new type of modern living. A notable migration took place from neighbouring and remote villages to the city that now had communities that added variety to the scene, and participated in the city's commercial and social activities.

The demographic structure of the city changed. Before WWI the majority of the population of twenty thousand was Moslems. Orthodox Christians constituted one quarter of the population. During the Mandate, the city hosted citizens of the ex-Ottoman state such as Maronites, Armenians, Greeks and immigrants from Crete, in addition to some Italians and French. During WWII, Moroccan, English, Senegalese and Australian soldiers resided in it for some time.

This is a picture captured by the memory of the contemporaries, and gives us an idea about a demographic change and expansion. It is a picture transmitted to the independence period after 1943. If we remove the décor of WWII off this picture, the resulting structure appears to be of permanent and continuous characteristics, as if, from the point of view of the social structure and activity, the independence period is a continuation of the Mandate.

It would only be three to four years after independence and WWII, when matters developed unceasingly, not here only, but all over the East. The first Israeli-Arab war erupted, resulting in the arrival

of a wave of Palestinians who were compelled to leave their homes, and this blatantly affected the mood of the city. At that moment, what seemed to be stability was shaken, and a process similar to an operation to remove the traces of colonialism started.

It is not possible to comprehend matters the way we mention without casting an historical tint on the sequence of events, and rearranging these matters rationally, particularly that they seem reactionary in their time. Difficult circumstances and critical moments are what rearrange things, changing viewpoints and influencing public opinion, and gradually affecting the demographic structure of the city. Communities of Jews, Armenians, Greeks and others who had lived here for some time, now thought about migrating, either to near or faraway countries. Some of the Maronites who settled in the city for some time also thought of leaving it, for various reasons, including heading towards the capital city[7] that is the centre of activity, administration and work.

Indeed, the scene that became the city's character in the first half of the twentieth century was part of changes that stormed the Eastern Mediterranean right after WWI in the twenties. In all the coastal cities from Greece to Turkey, to Syria and Palestine, groups of various ethnicities were on the move. There was some relatively wide spread civic exchange involving the opposite shores of the Mediterranean.

We had to wait ten years before witnessing a wave of local violence, but the ten years between 1948 and 1958 were full of events, and we are here concerned with their civic aspect. Population exchange among the cities receded. The Italians and Greeks kept away from the shores of Egypt and the eastern shores, some

[7] Beirut.

of the Armenians headed towards Europe and the United States of America, the Jewish minorities dwindled in the cities almost to nothing, and an intransigence in religious and national feelings took hold as a belated reaction to an abhorred colonialism.

During critical times, and in fits repeated approximately once every ten years: 1948-1958 and 1967-1975, there is chaotic destruction or demolition that takes the mark of removing colonialism, its symbols, its likes and its traces. It extends to institutions that resemble the colonial example or are its remnants. Periods of calm and local peace witness, as well, demolition and systematic local removal of constructions related to the colonial period. Over the past thirty years, organised demolition of the greater part of buildings of the missionary and the Mandate periods has taken place. The school that had occupied a large area of land at the border of the old city inside the Christian Quarter was sold to a number of local financiers after its administration and pupils moved outside the city. The buyers demolished the old edifice that educated generation after generation of students over a century, leaving the place that was once a school an empty square. Through its naked space, you could see the old city that had been horribly mutilated over the years.

A few years ago an Italian school was sold. The building was demolished completely, and the colonial trees were uprooted. Before that, *Les Freres* at the harbour was demolished.

L'Azarette, the French girls school that was established at the end of the nineteenth century beside the old city was like a doorstep to the new city. It was surrounded by a great wall, so that nothing could be seen from outside except the tiled roofs of the buildings inside. Watching girls was only possible

during departure time when the great iron-gate was opened. In the area that was occupied by the school, five or six buildings were constructed forming what looked like a popular commercial and residential quarter: a mixture of offices, shops and apartments. But there are other older examples. The American Hospital and the American Library disappeared. Some western financial institutions and commercial agencies departed. We mean by that establishments belonging to a previous era, and missions built and kept by active missionaries as we mentioned before. The prime of these institutions was, however, during the colonial era. When that era subsided, some of these institutions started to decline. Some others, however, was able to preserve its continuity and adapt to the new circumstances, particularly that the style of life associated with the French attracted many inhabitants of the city. In contrast, there was a tendency to remove aspects of western life, particularly those at odds with local customs, and those that failed to colour local life by their colour. Those aspects fell and receded.

What is noteworthy is the reproduction of the same western type, or a similar one, by the city folks themselves. In the period following 1948, a wave of cinemas spread in the city: large and neat theatres of Italian or American type, taking striking western names. After 1958, the phenomenon of street cafés spread, again according to western specifications with foreign names. After 1967, came the turn of boutique shops that sold cloths and ready made goods, at a time when the traditional crafts of the old city were declining. After 1975, construction of residential buildings and clusters led to the creation of quarters and streets similar to the type known in the south of Italy or the southern cities of the United States of America.

Some demolition is followed by construction, and the spread of building phenomena akin to the growth of fungi. Demolition, however, did not stop at edifices of the time of the Mandate and the missionaries only. It also affected historical buildings and edifices such as the demolition of the late Ottoman constructions such as the Government House, the police station, some schools and other buildings. In addition, there was the demolition of constructions built by the city inhabitants only a few decades before, such as the Electricity Company and the elegant hotel surrounded by a rose garden. Here and there, residential apartments took hold, and lanes for work and dwelling were formed.

It is a deep dialectic, commutative and to a large extent confusing. There is demolition followed by expansion in the spread of building. In the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, modern construction had a striking identity revealing French and Italian models, and others. Construction used to integrate all the meanings associated with particular life styles. Dwellers of the old city revealed themselves by their cloths, professions and methods of recreation. Dwellers of the modern city revealed themselves by contrasting comparative features. Modern construction used to storm into old construction. Today, however, a demographic mutation connects the old and the modern: the old is no longer old, and the new has not ascended to the level of modernism.

In all of that, there does not seem to be a certain identity for either the removal of certain landmarks, or the construction of alternatives. It seems that we have to search for the meaning of all of that in a different way. There are reasons for demolishing older buildings, and those no longer comfortable in order to construct buildings and establishments that

are more commercially viable. In place of a school with all its large fields, areas, and even spacious classrooms, it is possible to build several commercial and residential buildings. This explanation is, however, a partial one. Those great buildings, after losing their functions, cannot fit any more within the fabric of the city. This is why it seems that their only fate is demolition. Lovers of the ancient and the old can feel sad to see this excessive destruction. It is possible to suggest that this building or that can be changed into a museum! Impractical, by any viewpoint.

There is a demographic storm without any identity, bestowing its type to the city's construction. It is neither old nor modern. In this dialectic of building, demolition and rebuilding, there is some tearing to parts of the identity, and some deterioration of both heritage and modernism alike. These are buildings with no eminence or prestige, lacking in taste and shape, aiming at guaranteeing elementary living conditions.

Some of those who left the old city four or five decades ago, and sold their copper bed, wooden box and the wardrobe with mirrors, now establish societies for the preservation of that ancient relic and that mosque. Some others return to the old souk[8] to search for the coal iron and the copper bowl. It is the search for the fragments of the spread identity, and a deceptive yearning to the self in its search for a token originality. But those who show their remorse for demolishing those solid edifices, and for the decline of those buildings that are over five centuries old, do not do, or can do anything to preserve what remains.

All cities are heading to represent types without identity. The construction movement of today, and as

[8] Market place.

it has been going on for some time, indicates a loss of identity. We are neither in the East nor in the West, passing a period difficult to name and identify. Cities consistently grow in a form expressing the emerging generations.

Leisure Time

Scenes. There are only scattered scenes in my memory. Each of them is like a framed picture; pictures of places. In one, to the right there is a wide sandy area surrounded by houses and to the left a stone-wall along the road that crosses it. Behind the stone-wall there are trees, mostly of the old Eucalyptus variety. The details of this picture render themselves indelible in memory of the landscape and surface in the mind as well defined fragments of the bigger picture. I see a wooden gate with a metal handle on top; one of many gates immediately overlooking the neighbourhood. Between two gates, leading to two separate houses, appears a narrow path that, in its turn, leads to other gates and houses.

Within the framed landscape there are green areas of trees that do not lose their colour despite the change in seasons. Even in memory the bright sunshine of summer and greyish dullness of winter are still distinct. Throughout the changing seasons the public square always seems to be a few centimetres higher, as if a thick layer of red sand has covered it. This view is somewhat different when we climb the stone-wall that we often use as an upper path for our play, or stand on a roof. Then the picture becomes greener and a minaret appears on the horizon.

I played in the sandy area long before I went to school. The thick sand that stained the asphalt road with a dusty colour had given the area its name ages before. We called it *al-hara*.[9] The only barrier between it and our house was a wooden gate, with a threshold that was more than just a symbolic barrier between everything inside and everything outside. *Al-hara,* which started at the public square, included the surrounding houses, the road, the shops and the children who lived there.

These were scenes and pictures of particular places; repeated copies or different shots of the same view. Places out of time and out of date, with colour being the only thing they gained from the changes of season. I feel as if memory can recognise places before it can time and stays put. Nevertheless, soon time crawls into these views and moves them as if freeing each one from its frame, transferring it from stillness into motion, filling it with people, expressions, words and noise. The sandy square in front of our house and the other squares, near and far, that I came to know later, were like paths through which time escaped, changing the view.

No matter how heavily populated the neighbourhoods were in the city, or how close their buildings were, they still preserved some vacant land. Sometimes a neighbourhood would spread sideways to meet a vast empty area, or to join a road leading to other neighbourhoods. Hence, boys of *al-hara* spent a lot of their time in different squares, where they filled the atmosphere with the noise of their play, using toys they made themselves. By contrast, their homes

[9] The lane.

maintained a solemn state; no noise, no play, no talking in the presence of the elderly and early to bed. Mothers obsessed with protecting their homes from the mess of their children made certain that the rules of the house were not to be broken. Thus *al-hara* became the resort of our leisure time.

Leisure contradicted time, for time escaped to those places in the form of boredom. Time penetrated the stillness of our homes and resided heavy and thick as if wanting to sweep the place or re-form it in its image. Thus entered TIME to our world of childhood. We tried to pass it by waiting, or kill it by playing whenever that was possible.

Yet we did not learn about time, or concern ourselves with it, until we started our schooling. It was very hard to make time pass there. Strict schedules, calculated minute by minute, made us realise the value of the short school breaks, as compared with the longer lazy times of the summer holidays.

I grew up in *al-hara*. I was a child who did not accept food easily, so my older sister used to carry me in her arms to the eucalyptus tree by the stone-wall, to convince me to eat my food. So, even before going to school I started forming friendships with some boys in *al-hara* whose faces or names I cannot recall.

We had fun, but we spent most of the time in that sandy square. I used to stay behind with other pre-school boys when my sisters and brothers went to school. In our world - *al-hara* - there was no fear for the children, as there was always one neighbour or another keeping an eye on them. Cars came into the square or passed through the side roads only occasionally. The square was our front yard.

Further out, there was a lonely Mamluki[10] mosque located among the fields. It marked the last border of our wandering and playing. It had a plaque showing its name and the year it was built seven centuries before, creating a legendary status for it in our imagination. We were fascinated by the tales of the mosque's double-stair minaret. We were apprehensive about entering it, and even if we had tried the keeper would have prevented us.

A primitive and aimless play characterised the painful passage of time that rested heavy on our childhood. As I started crossing over to other sides of the square, I began to feel that it was expanding. I added new dimensions to those still scene as I accompanied some of my family members on their visits and outings; other houses beyond the ones I knew, faces, shops, gates and roofed alleys leading to pathways to other lanes. I became able to reach a point from which to observe the traffic on the main road, where noise contrasted with the stillness of our lane in the morning periods. Amidst my discoveries, we moved houses to another *hara*. I was sad. My mother noticed that I was the least happy of her children about that move.

The neighbourhood to which we moved was not far away from the one where I was born, but only rarely did I go back. So, my memory retained changeless scenes from it. Our new neighbourhood was located on what looked like a hill, with a few olive trees and a path going up the hill to the houses on top. We

[10] Or Mameluki. Pertaining to the Mamluks- originally slaves, then members of a military class who became the rulers of Egypt 1250-1517.

called the hill *Jabal*.[11] At the bottom which led to the public road, there was a flat square that formed part of the whole landscape. We spent our time between the flat soil square where there were few old trees, and the *Jabal*. What we used to think of as random fun had an inherent order that was in fact in its final years before being broken by the fever of change.

There was an inner demarcation line in all that scene that made the boys go out and kept the girls at home. An early separation? Girls played at home with hand-made toys from rags, whereas boys played with materials from the surrounding nature outside. The other segregation that characterised our leisure time in the neighbourhood was the division of boys into groups. We liked to call each group a gang. It was easy to go from one gang to another. This usually happened after an argument. The only thing that united us was an attack from outsiders. We used to unite in alliances that disintegrated as soon as the round of outside aggression was over.

Sometimes, the square we considered *ours* would be occupied by teenagers who thought of themselves as adults. Their arrival meant the younger ones were kicked out, left a minor space or transformed into an audience. There was an air of both mystery and pretension about their presence. Usually it foreshadowed something: a competition in cutting canes into two halves in one hit of a knife, a violent fight, or a show of strength by showing their pocket knives and taking them from under their leather belts.

The square we thought ours, also belonged to street vendors, especially those who sold sweets, candies, hand-made drinks and cookies after the evening prayer, as well as ice-cream in summer. The square

[11] Mountain.

itself would become a massive festival ground during the feasts of *Eid al-Fitr*, after the holy month of Ramadan,[12] and *Eid al-Adha*, the season of the pilgrimage to Mecca. We also called them *the little eid* and *the big eid* respectively. The norm was that during Ramadan, wooden swings were erected awaiting the beginning of the festivities. We never questioned the fact that these wooden machines were kept hidden in the same square for the rest of the year, secured by thick cables to existing posts and walls. They kept their elegance over the years and were passed from generation to generation. Those who inherited them also inherited the right to use the square for the feast and its rituals.

The unwritten rule that governed the neighbourhood maintained that when boys became teenagers, they should leave the square for those who were younger. They were not tolerated there, but were driven to the outskirts of the city. They used to head towards three areas: a hill in the east, the sea to the west and the coastal highway south. The road to the north led to a lake about which many tales were told. The lake was surrounded by seats for the benefit of picnic goers arriving from the city to spend their time smoking the hooka and feeding the fish with bits of bread. Men could go to pray in the nearby mosque, which also provided playing grounds with a lot of shade.

Those places were not invented by those boys. They were conceived by the city, for each city creates the

[12] The month in the Moslem calendar during which Moslems observe a daily fast, from dawn to sunset. During the fast, one of the pillars of Islam, a Moslem abstains from things such as food, drink, smoking and sex. It is believed that the Koran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) during Ramadan. The festivity marking the conclusion of Ramadan is called Eid al-Fitre (*Fitre* means "breaking the fast", and *eid* means "festivity" or "celebration").

spaces that are located outside its imaginary walls. To reach those places, the olive fields on the hill or the orange orchards near the sea, the coastal road must be crossed. During certain seasons every year, the city dwellers, old and young, women and children, made their way to those destinations where they spent a whole day having fun, particularly during the spring.

The scene of our *al-hara* did not collapse until it missed its appointment with its familiar time, and other times took over.

The Night

We were used to the night coming early, shortly after sunset. The nights fell quickly in winter, just after our return from school. Winter was an ally of the night. In the summer, however, we were able to stay up longer and enjoy the lingering twilight evenings. Night gave us the security of family togetherness, but it was also a source of fear due to the darkness and its frightening fairy tales. One distant relation of my mother's was of Turkish origins. Her visits to us lasted a few days at a time and were full of horror stories that crept up on me in the night. She was the first person to impart to me the sense of fear. The vast endless darkness allowed myths and jinn stories to intermingle and disturb our nights.

Relatives' visits in those days lasted a few days, even when they were living in the same town. During every visit, the order of the house was turned upside down, particularly in relation to sleeping arrangements. The visits also enlivened our evenings. We were allowed to stay awake longer and we heard unusual news. We loved those visits. They gave us all the excuses we needed to neglect our homework.

Generally, the black dark night of fear and myth remained outside the house— buildings and lanes drowned in endless murkiness. In reality, our fear of the night contrasted with the peace enjoyed by the city. Fear has its own independent structure, fed by a conservative attitude scared of adventure. Thus the city surrendered to the night and completely subjugated itself without resistance.

The long nights were interrupted by the sounds of whistles and sirens coming from ships anchored

nearby, or those announcing the departure of trains from the station. Sometimes the whistles of the night patrol guards, equipped with their pistols and batons, woke us up. They would send repeated signals to each other for a time, then they would stop suddenly and we would go back to sleep.

The early evening saw the return of the men after their day's work to the *hara* where their homes were located and for a time the neighbourhood was a hive of activity. The main markets closed for the day and the corner shops prepared themselves to receive the night customers. There was a lot of coming and going between the houses and the *hara*. Some men would go into the street in their pyjamas to purchase their needs. This continued until nine o'clock, when things usually quietened down. Then the darkness of the *souk* extended to the *hara*, particularly that the only café that remained open for tea-drinkers in the early evening closed to be ready for a dawn start. The square, the road and the lanes became empty except for some late passers-by.

The night started early and finished early. The minarets announced the end of the night two hours before the first gleam of dawn could be distinguished from the surrounding blackness. Holy recitals were broadcast before the Dawn Prayer. Among the first to stir were those who left their homes at four in the morning to attend prayers, outdone only by the bakery workers. The café was ready to receive its customers with the early light of the morning - casual workers awaiting a chance or workmen preparing themselves for a long day. About six, shops and markets were opened and a new day began in the city.

The night brought its unavoidable flood of darkness as if it were an enemy's army, against which we were defended by those guards and their batons. They

started their shift with the fall of darkness. They were the sentinels of the streets, the lanes and the market place, checking locks and examining the faces of passers-by. With this, they continued rituals as old as civilisation itself, inheriting the tradition of the town night-watchers of olden times. The city's evenings were as they had been for hundreds of years; with the closing of its doors and gates, walking became an act of bravery.

The rhythm of our city revealed how generations of citizens endured the night through prayers. Actually, the night was trapped between the Evening Prayer and the Dawn Prayer; a span of seven or eight hours deliberately reduced by those who prayed by extending the Evening Prayer by one hour or more and attending the Dawn Prayer at least one hour before it was due. Celebrating the Prophet's Birthday and other occasions such as the mid-point of the month of *Shaban*, in addition to the Sufi rituals invoking the name of Allah, were all ways of overcoming the night and dissipating its melancholy.

During the month of Ramadan each year, the city dared the night and belittled it. It filled the night with the calls of the *mossahheroon* and the sounds of their instruments inviting the sleepers to wake up and take the *sahoor*, the last light meal before daybreak, after which no food was to be taken until the next sunset. The nights of Ramadan were also full of the noise of peddlers and those spending the night in cafés or awake at home. There were those who snipped at the sides of the night by staying awake between breaking the fast at sunset and the *sahoor*.

Going out at night was done only if necessary, except for drunkards and tramps - or so we imagined. Who would dare to pass by some of those desolate buildings, even during the hours of daylight? The night was a time for weaving every

fabric of imagining about these buildings. Children whispered what their elders told them: "haunted".

There was another night beyond the grasp of our childhood and youth. It was to be found in the new part of the city; a lit night, ridden of our fears and not visited by the jinn that terrified us. The reality was that our parents and the inhabitants of the old city did not immerse themselves in the nightlife of The Mandate created by the colonial authorities. So the night during that period reflected the separate modes of living: that of the French and those who shared their ways, and that of the citizens of the traditional city. The colonial night centred around the modern city where hotels, bars and parties mixing men and women flourished. The inhabitants of the old city mixed myth and reality when they talked about that other life existing a few metres away from their own.

The modernisation that had occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century gradually conquered the night and shortened it by the means available to that era. Oil lamps with their pale spreading light, placed on timber posts erected on corners and at the entrances to lanes, were lit in the evening and extinguished in the morning by the torch lighter using a long cane. But the oil lanterns and the electrical lamps that later replaced them on the same timber posts were too faint to allow pedestrians a sure footing.

Electricity crept into the space of the city and eliminated some of the desolation of the night. And under the light of the lamps that became brighter, western modernity crept insolently like a thief into that side of the city it had created for itself. For years after the departure of the French, the citizens remained cautious about the modern colonial city that maintained its "Mandate"-style night and except during feasts, we were not allowed to venture into

that side of the city.

During the nineteen fifties, young men, particularly those who were employed by the government, were able to establish links between the night of the modern city and that of the old one. They started exploring the nightlife that had grown up during the days of The Mandate. For them, staying awake hanging around extended till dawn.

The city did not unify its night, but new formulae emerged. The impact of radio during the nineteen fifties was decisive in breaking the isolation of the city and its preoccupation with its own stories and news. Evening habits changed rapidly and the silence of the night was broken by the voices of broadcasters and singers who became familiar "visitors". The huge radio set on its special table occupied a respected and permanent corner of the sitting room. In its golden age, the radio received more attention than any other piece of furniture. Part of the wall that divided generations within families had been demolished along with the wall that divided night and day.

The radio was a political and linguistic instrument, promoting national slogans. It was also a vital tool for women to discover a world that existed outside the boundaries of family and home. Women listened to radio series and to recorded Egyptian stories about love between men and women. Radio assisted women in particular in learning a vocabulary hitherto unknown to them and it made them more ready to leave the confined world of the home. Radio conquered the market place as well, occupying a prominent place in shops, and its voice prevailed over all other voices that distinguished the market place of the city.

The city did not unify its night. The inner markets and the old lanes preserved the quietness of their nights, whilst the citizens answered the call of

modernisation illuminated by city lights in wide streets and expanding suburbs.

Modernisation, well equipped, was usurping the night, transforming it from an enemy into an agent to promote its style. The new city plans presented an architecture that resisted the darkness. Wide, straight streets were lit by fluorescent and neon lights with white radiance. Shop windows, kept lit during the night, started to amuse passers-by and people who gathered in cafés, restaurants and cinemas that used coloured lights to attract attention. Night wardens also roamed these modern streets and we used to mock their appearance as they walked among us as if they had mistaken the night they were guarding.

Our traditional night, embodying family togetherness around the dinner table, or the fireplace in winter, had given way to another night that had to do with going out and staying awake in public places. And those ever-spreading, ever-gleaming lights encouraged occasions and rituals to which we quickly became habituated. The night-lights expelled the myths that had surrounded the news of the night and swept away the darkness of the streets like a thin layer of dust. The invasion of women into the night with its mixed parties mirrored what we had watched with amazement in the movies and was the precursor to a decisive change in the values of family and society and an explosion of a style of living that seemed to have come suddenly, without introduction.

Nothing hitherto had signalled such a change, as did the transformation of the night that we witnessed during those years of childhood and early youth. It was as if the modern city had been elevated on the wings of darkness tamed by the electric lamps of the builders. The night, so crammed with lights and brightly lit shop windows that pieces of day were created amidst the night, rearranged time - or

perhaps invented another time. The traditional night was outside time, each night resurrecting the ancient past and taking us back to it. But the night of spellbinding lights had already replaced the horrifying fairy tales with engaging promises.

The Mediterranean

I could see a long strip of the sea from our balcony. I could also see tankers waiting to be loaded with oil from the refinery north of the city. I often stood alone, silent, gazing at a departing ship until it completely disappeared beyond the horizon. Through the summer nights, and even during the winter, I used to count the lights coming from the fishing boats. The sea dominated the wide landscape behind the citrus orchards, producing a scene of blue and green shades. The sea was the sea, with no name or definition, until I reached grade four at school, when, to my great surprise, I learned that the "Mediterranean" that appeared in our school maps was the same sea I saw from our balcony.

The city where we lived was three kilometres from the shore, a distance that could be walked in an hour. My family, however, were not seafarers and had none of the seafaring traditions. Our city was a conservative one and it had surrendered its *al-Minaa*,[13] which was almost a city in its own right, to the caprices of the sea. The city did not embrace the sea's customs, which occupied no part of its daily concerns or of its culture. There were no fishermen's songs, no tales or adventures that could be spoken of. Our plates seldom contained the fruits of the sea. We left all that to the inhabitants of *al-Minaa* who were very proud of their port, as if they were living in a different city in a different world.

Al-Minaa was a summer holiday spot for the city's inhabitants who used to hire horse-drawn carriages

[13] Port.

for the journey. Later, they took taxis, which could do the trip in five minutes. We used to visit *al-Minaa* during the two feasts, *al-Fitre* and *al-Adha*, if the weather permitted. Our main purpose in going was to ride the sea on the fishing boats that had been converted by their owners so they could ferry the children from the city to the nearest island. The next day, we wouldn't be able to stop talking about the immensity of the sea and the power of its waves. This was only one ritual of several that the children of the feast had to try at least once.

There were several seas in our young imaginations: the sea we saw from our balcony was different from the mythological seas in the stories of *Sindbad* and those of the pirates in the movies. It was also different from the sea near *al-Minaa* with its real fishermen, nets as blue as the sea, boats, ships, and anchors.

The seaside had only recently acquired its attraction as a place for recreation. It began when the French and the English, who built the refinery during The Mandate, introduced the habit of sunbathing and swimming in the sea. They built chalets in a few places along the coast, and some locals did the same.

The attraction the sea had for the boys of our city came later. They used to swim in the city's river, but a flood resulted in works to widen it, which ended the age-old tradition of river swimming, and made way for the era of sea swimming. This attracted the young people, but not their elders who had never taken to this practice anyway.

During those youthful years, I used to walk to the sea with my friends down narrow roads, which passed through the citrus orchards and reached the beach where there was a row of unroofed stone cabins. We could hire one of these cabins for a small fee, but we often opted for changing our clothes behind the cabins, on the side facing a group of five

bamboo shacks, which were allocated for use by families. We frequently passed by these shacks trying to steal a look inside through gaps between the compacted bamboo sticks. The very few women there, however, used to swim with their clothes on, so we would wait until they emerged wet from the water.

The five bamboo shacks were erected at a distance from the stone cabins. The grown-ups would avoid passing near them out of respect. Usually no one would approach the isolated area allocated for women, who normally occupied themselves with looking after their children.

It was a modest beach with its own character. The boys called it "*Gaskhana*", after the oil reservoirs that were there years before. The place kept this Ottoman name, even after the reservoirs had been abandoned, and it became synonymous with our summers of sun and swimming.

At the beginning of the century, the beach was neglected. It had no landmark, except for the crusader tower, which was a desolate place surrounded by tall trees making it a fertile ground for our imaginary tales. We were awed by the tower and believed that it was a place for serpents and vultures. There were no vultures, but bats nestled among the tower's sandstones.

The beach where we bathed, with its cabins and bamboo shacks, stood between one side of the tower and the gate to *al-Minaa*. This is where the railway station buildings were erected during The Mandate. Even a quarter of a century after they were built, they kept all the tradition of that period: the yellow paint that covered their walls, the buttonwood tree in the middle of the cafeteria, the external showers, the wrought iron gates and the Latin letters *D.H.P.* above the entrance, an abbreviation of the railway

company's name. The station's employees also retained some of The Mandate's influences. They often mentioned the English, their discipline and austerity, and their short-lived presence at the end of World War Two. I used to think that some French or English people secretly ran the affairs of the station, because the employees often used foreign words, particularly when speaking over the phone to other stations about work matters. Most of them were foreigners who had travelled from city to city until they settled here: Armenians, Greeks, Aleppans[14] and others. There was a great mix of religions.

The station provided an oasis of life in that desolate environment, particularly when the train arrived from Homs[15] or Aleppo. This was the express passenger train whose siren I was able to hear from home. Suddenly, the platform would fill with people and bags, but it would be empty again a few minutes later.

My friends and I used to hang about the railway station during the summer holidays, on our way to the beach. My father was one of its employees. I used to move in and out of its offices as if they belonged to us; I climbed the buttonwood tree, and played inside the trains in the rail yards. I preferred this to swimming. They were huge black trains with passenger compartments where we sat on wooden seats and played the travellers' game. We entered through back doors and exited through windows, and climbed the iron ladders until we reached the roof. We thought we owned those trains. When a teacher asked my sister on her first day at school what her father did, she answered that he was a train seller.

[14] From the city of Aleppo in Syria.
[15] A city in Syria.

I enjoyed my city's environs, which stretched from our lane and the sandy hill on one side, to the railway station and the beach on the other. We considered the sandy hill a jungle where we fought with boys from neighbouring lanes to settle scores. During the summer, my mother used to take us to spend some days with her brothers in the nearby countryside, but I did not like the country life-style and the inhabitants were not much different from those in the city. I preferred the humidity of the city, the stickiness of its air mixed with the afternoon sadness of July and August, to the dryness of the country air. I was always happy to return to the city, where the trains, the sandy beach and the hill next to our lane were the subjects of my dreams.

The railway station was not the only legacy from The Mandate era, which had left its mark on towns all around the shores of the Mediterranean. All buildings of yellow colour belonged to that period, such as the army barracks on the hill overlooking the city and the refinery constructions at the northern entrance to the city. Some buildings from the last era of the Ottoman rule, such as the *Tal* Government House, the *Sultanyia* School, and our school, were dark yellow, the colour of official and governmental buildings. The colours gave an appearance of modernity to the city; a city that carried upon its shoulders relics from past ages.

The Mandate buildings kept more than their yellow colour and the Latin letters at their main entrances. The army barracks maintained their French system for a long time. When I went to the seaside early in the morning, it was possible for me to meet the return of a long row of soldiers with their metallic helmets, preceded by an officer on a horse and followed by wooden carriages loaded with gear and drawn by mules. The whole scene looked like a movie

clip from a Second World War film, with no relation to the environment in which it was moving. Employees of the *ABC*, however, adhered more to the traditions they inherited from English administrators. They had built an enclosure outside the city, which was fenced by barbed wire so that it was inaccessible to anyone but themselves. Here, they practised their sports: swimming, golf and soccer. They also established a club inside the city that they went to on Saturday nights. Near the club, bookshops selling English books and magazines were available. In another corner of the city, near the *Rahbat* and *Frères* schools, some bookshops sold French books and magazines.

Every European country had a resident consul in the city, usually chosen from the local Christian Orthodox community, or a Maronite from the neighbouring countryside. Since the early nineteenth century, French, Italians and other nationals have crossed the Mediterranean to come to our city. Nationals from Poland and Czechoslovakia, especially, arrived in large numbers. These travellers were military personnel, administrators and priests to run missionary schools, and others who had commercial or political reasons for coming. The Mediterranean influence came not only from the European shores, but also from islands such as Malta, Cyprus and particularly Crete.

Soon after the Mandate, a modern café was built in the city according to Ottoman style. It attracted Greek waiters who used to speak their own language as they worked. Locals who learnt the profession of hospitality from the Greeks, also picked up their language and Greek became the language of waiters around the city. Experienced Greek waiters later worked in hotels built during The Mandate. Italian

and Greek families ran *khamarat*[16] on the outskirts of the Old City. Armenians, who arrived in the early twentieth century, specialised in sandwich shops, which were narrow and neat, and photography. Armenians wearing hats stood behind their box cameras fixed on tripods in the middle of the New City square, taking shots for passers-by and visitors from the neighbouring countryside.

During The Mandate period, the city's streets were paved with black granite for the cars that were beginning to appear. A public park was established and planted with specially imported flowers. It had a fountain in its middle, so beautiful that one could not take one's eyes off it. This was a landscaped garden, with neatly planted odourless flowers that had no resemblance to the native roses, carnations and jasmine scattered among the old houses. Fast-growing evergreen trees surrounded the park. The main street filled up with hotels, cafés, photography shops, the Armenian sandwich shops and a lane frequented by people seeking recreation. Every evening when the souks in the Old City closed, life filled the New City, which lay under its Mediterranean sky. The street, clubs and cafés in the New City always had a few French ladies present, along with some local girls. Many of these girls had come from the countryside to live in the city, and they befriended the French or tried to mimic them.

This part of the city was a colonial district used by military and police commanders for their headquarters. They used its hotels and cafés for their leisure, and many stories were told about them. The Old City was not a venue for these imported novelties, but the New City was. It grew street after

[16] Liquor stores.

street until a totally modern city had developed on the outskirts of the old one.

Al-Minaa was the "advance front" of the city and its window to the sea. It was more responsive to the cosmopolitan Mediterranean influences, and it surrendered to them. Its streets were akin to those in Greek ports. Its people, with their shorts and white hats, seemed like travellers arriving from other shores. The road connecting the old town and *al-Minaa* opened towards the end of the Ottoman era. It began a period of architectural change and development and growth, until the city was like other Mediterranean towns, soaked by the sun during the day and filled with life during the night.

Some locals were attracted to the "Mediterranean" city. This attraction was not for ideological reasons, but rather for the way of life, adopted particularly by some segments of the city population according to their status, beliefs and level of education. The educated élite, the businessmen and politicians of the city thought they had found the ideal style of living. They felt that the life they had seen and so admired in other Mediterranean cities was now within their reach.

As I walked to the seaside or to the railway station, I used to cross the New City square, which encroached upon the citrus fields, and encapsulated the modern life that was dominated by the Mediterranean style. Everything was the same as it had been in the thirties and forties, about a quarter of a century before my summer crossings, and I gazed in bewilderment at the things around me. All Mediterranean nationalities, religions and cultures were there, coexisting in different proportions, and celebrating their particular festivals. It was a community of diversity, tolerance and happiness. Some local boys and young men used to participate in the celebrations

of the Greek Club, the Armenian Club or the French Centre. We used to go out of curiosity and the desire to steal glances at the girls.

From one summer to the next, as I made my way to the sea, I passed by the shops in the business district, which gave an impression of calm despite the activity. Beyond, the residential streets were peaceful and the few passers-by appeared gentle. During that period, I was not aware that the Mediterranean ambience was beginning to retreat.

Although the nineteen-sixties added to the Mediterranean character of the city, they also introduced the influences that would eventually bring the Mediterranean life to an end. Hotels, the supreme symbols of that era, lost their grandeur and entered into a state of decline; eventually they were demolished and replaced with new buildings. Some of the cafés that witnessed the history of the first half of the twentieth century were transformed into garages, storehouses or gambling halls. The square that had struggled to maintain its neatness and integrity as the centre of the city started to harbour peddlers and wanderers; a congestion that could not reveal any specific identity. Rather, it was akin to the congestion of Asian cities and, under its pressure, the Mediterranean features disappeared.

The Bygone Days

The first day of *Ramadan* sets the atmosphere for this month of fasting. We leave for school in the morning, feeling as though we are moving from our present time into a past time. We feel stronger and happier than usual.

There are several reasons for our happiness: the joy of waiting for this month, the clatter it creates in our houses, the shortening of our school day and the image of the whole city. There are also other details: the beating of the drum during the night, the firing of the cannon, the sweets of *Ramadan* and the new clothes we buy in anticipation for the *Eid*, the feast marking the end of fasting.

Ramadan commences once the crescent is seen by the naked eye and its beginning is announced by the firing of the cannon at *al-Qalaa*, the fort. For a few nights before that, we stay outside in the early hours of each evening waiting to catch the first glimpse of the newborn crescent. Sometimes this wouldn't happen until midnight, and such a delay in announcing the month would cause a great flurry in preparing for *Sahoor,* the last meal before the first day of the month breaks, when an abiding Moslem ceases to eat or drink until sunset. Preparing the meal under these circumstances turns into an affair involving the whole family, including children. Often, however, no sighting occurred and the announcement was delayed till the next day and we would go near *al-Qalaa* in the afternoon, confident that the cannon would fire with the call for prayer. We would witness the loading of the cannon and its ignition, followed by the blast that echoed

everywhere.

In my early youth, *Ramadan* coincided with the cold winter season, which made getting out of bed for the *Sahoor* a miserable task. I was not dedicated to fasting during my early school days, but participating in the *Sahoor* was vital, as this was a main ritual of the month and an announcement of one's intention to fast.

During the first day of *Ramadan*, the route I took to go to school seemed deserted and quiet and there was an air of tardiness in the movement of the few passers-by. Eating was restricted to the hours between sunset and dawn. The main meal (*Iftar*) now became the meal that broke the daily fast at sunset. This meant there was no urgency to shop in the morning as the shops opened later. Moussa Café was without customers during the day, its activity was resumed after *Iftar*. The *fül* restaurant was closed in the morning, but became busy in the afternoon preparing its popular meal of cooked beans, often used as a starter for the *Iftar*.

Even our arrival at school was later than usual. *Ramadan* was the subject of our school conversation. Almost every young student was fasting, at least for the early hours of the day. We all became quiet; there were no violent games and no running about in the schoolyard. The school vendor disappeared, for who would dare buy anything even if one was not fasting? Classes were shorter now and they passed quickly. The school day now ended at twelve thirty rather than four thirty in the afternoon. We enjoyed *Ramadan* for this reduction in our school time.

My early *Ramadans* coincided with winter, rendering the days shorter and the fasting easier, in contrast to fasting during long summer days. Spending half of our day at school helped in reducing the sting of our hunger. We spent the remainder of

the day hanging about in the *souk*, which became full of activity in the afternoon. We kept asking about the time and waited for the blast announcing the breaking of the fast.

Ramadan was not for us a mere practice of faith. It was a concrete symbol affecting every aspect of our lives. It was a whole combination of feelings, sensations, scenes, rituals, sounds, names and idioms.

During the afternoon we browsed in the market place, looking at the shops that sold sweets, clothes and shoes. We looked closely at their ware for a long time, preparing ourselves for the choices we were going to make in celebrating the *Eid*. But we also wanted to pass time. Our favourite section was the perfume market. Perfumers had a strong connection to the piety associated with *Ramadan*. What they sold had a true association with this month of fasting. We were attracted to their displays of apple fruits implanted with dried carnation, spreading a scent that appeased our hunger.

We were not the only ones attracted to the *souk* during *Ramadan*. The old *souk* attracted all folks, including those residing in modern suburbs. *Ramadan* seemed to revive their nostalgia for their past. Most of the mosques were located in the old town and in order to fulfill one's faith, one had to come to the old town to practise traditional rituals and celebrate the spirituality of the month.

Ramadan imposed its strict rules on the city and forced it to abandon its normal routine. We felt this through changes in our school programmes, as well as in our sleep patterns. We were awakened by the drum of the *Mussaher* alerting us to the time of the *Sahoor*, one or two hours before dawn. Then we returned to sleep after the dawn prayer. This delayed the city's wake-up time. Activity in the market place was sluggish in the early morning, but gained

momentum in the afternoon, when its clatter escalated and then subsided again in the short period preceding the blast announcing the *Iftar* at the sunset prayer. The whole city was then wrapped in silence. The streets were deserted. Then came the blast of the cannon and the voice of the muezzin calling for prayer.

An hour after the *Iftar*, the streets regained their busy life as the evening of *Ramadan* started. We were allowed to spend time out and popular cafés became full of patrons. Families went on their evening visits and the youth compensated for their morning laziness with evening activity.

Ramadan was our premier practice of faith. Fasting required praying in the mosque and attending religious classes. Our faith underwent examination and training. At age six or seven, we fasted for half a day only. We learned about religion through our questions concerning what was permitted, what was prohibited and about the rules of prayer and fasting.

During the last days of *Ramadan*, our studies slackened off and gave way to increased market activity. Everyone became busy with the approach of the *Eid*. We held our breath with increasing enthusiasm as people exchanged visits to bid the holy month farewell.

We woke up earlier than usual on the first day of the *Eid*, enthusiastic about putting on our new clothes. Then we set about enjoying in full the three days of the feast. Men started the *Eid* by praying at the mosque, then they accompanied their families to visit relations. The youth enjoyed the relative freedom they were given and went on a spree of continuous festivity in the market squares, where many games, stalls, peddlers and shops were available.

There was an *Eid* of a different sort in the square of the modern city, where the young men came from

every quarter and filled the square with their joy and noise. In those days, the cinema was introduced as the newest addition to the festivity of the *Eid*. We discovered its world in halls crammed with the young people of the *Eid*.

We often felt depressed about how quickly time went during those joyful periods. The last evening of the *Eid* was a sad affair for us. *Ramadan* was gone, and so was the *Eid*. We extended the *Eid* by absenting ourselves from school for a further day, for which we were forgiven, but this did not bring back the bygone days.

Moslems and Christians

The *hara*, our quarter, was our world. We boys only left it on certain occasions. It was also our playing field, and we played on the nearby hill or alongside the cemetery. And it was also our symbolic world. We lived at one end of the city, but kept in touch with its ancient heart. This is why my knowledge of other parts of the city remained limited. For most of the time in my early youth, my feeling of belonging to the *hara* took precedence over any other sense of belonging, to the extent that I considered boys from other parts of the city to be strangers. Luckily, I eventually started to realise that we all shared the same city. The *hara* started to come out of its isolation gradually, as did other city localities. Nevertheless, my connection to the *hara* did not fade completely. It was part of my nature, and I always kept part of it in my soul.

It was an isolated place, yet it was connected to all other parts of the city without interruption. There were no gates to be locked during the night, though some of the old city streets carried the names of gates that had existed in the past.

Our old *hara* was moulded by traditions two or three centuries old. A Christian family dwelt in one old house; I remember some girls who used to tailor clothes with their middle-aged mother. Yvonne, one of the girls, was full-bodied. I do not recall the names or features of the other girls.

Having a few Christian families residing in our midst did not seem strange and it was part of the image I had in my mind of the *hara*. Other things aroused my curiosity, such as the family of the Turk

and his elegant daughters, or the Moroccan sheikh who kept his women under full quarantine. Despite its image as a uniform society, the *hara* was full of human diversity. The *hara* brought together many people from different places and gave them a sense of constancy. There were people in that secluded world who were unable to change. Things were carefully designed, as if every person occupied a particular, unshifting space.

School was considered the first change that took us out of the narrow world of the *hara*, despite the fact that my first school was located on our side of the city forming a continuation of the world to which I belonged. I could easily reach it by following an almost straight line along the *souk* of the old town without crossing a street or passing a road. The *souk* was long and no cars could drive through. The distance my brother and I covered comprised only one quarter of the length of the *souk*. If I continued to walk, I would reach the other end of the city past the river, but I never undertook such a feat on my own.

The people in the *souk* that I passed four times every day were also inhabitants of the city. Their children were my classmates. Our teachers were of the same blood as our family and we could follow them to discover their nearby dwellings. Our parents knew them, but their methodical strictness seemed to be from a different era or world. Their features captured remnants of the Ottoman past, but most of them were trained in colonial schools from where they learned about discipline and obligations. A severe punishment was imposed on whoever deviated or neglected his duties.

The French teacher of the highest class at my school was not one of our own, he was not of our *hara* or our city. He was a Christian. He wore a grey or a

navy blue coat. His students wore dark coats. Our uniform in primary classes was a black apron, like all the younger pupils in the city.

After 1960, younger teachers started to arrive at our school as a result of a new employment initiative to select primary and secondary school teachers. They were teachers in their thirties and not as enthusiastic to impose punishment as their older peers. There were three Christians among the new recruits and one in particular drew our attention because he wore a coloured shirt and no dark coat. He was closer to the students in age and behaviour than the other teachers. Another teacher always wore a black coat and a white shirt with a strange collar, the like of which we had not seen before. We later learned that he was a religious Christian. He was a very kind man, but we managed to startle him during one of his classes when the call of the muezzin from the nearby *Tahham* Mosque came loud and clear and the whole class stood as one, raising their forefingers in a prayer gesture and mimicking the muezzin's call by uttering in a low voice, 'there is no god but Allah and Mohammad is His apostle'. This was our way of showing him that we were different! The few Christian teachers in our school had to accept this situation when the midday or afternoon call for prayer fell within one of their classes. Such behaviour would not have been tolerated by either a teacher of our own religion or one from our *hara*.

In my fourth primary year, I moved to a school located in the middle of the modern city, not far from the apartment where we now resided. Our old *hara* had its roots in Ottoman history. Our new *hara* was a product of The Mandate, with some aspects only completed in the nineteen fifties. It received residents from nearby villages, rendering the majority of its population of the Christian faith up until the early

nineteen sixties. My initial feeling was that we now resided in a Christian district that was an extension of the Christian Quarter of the old town, but the reality was different. This was one of several multicultural districts that flourished during that time. Christians, Moslems, villagers and city folks lived side by side. Even further than that, our neighbour was a Christian of Palestinian origin and the only grocer in the street was a Greek who lived in the building opposite ours. There was also a French family and many Syrian families.

The passage of time opened the way for limited socialising, mainly by women. My mother considered that our real neighbours were those we left back in the old *hara*. We believed that we lived in a temporary environment. I avoided friendships with the boys of this *hara*, but I used to watch the girls and talk over the balcony to the daughters of the Greek grocer.

The aspects of the new *hara* in the nineteen sixties would gradually be erased, but in the meantime I was carefully exploring and meticulously observing our new world. The street was for me an anthropological place. I watched the Christians from the villages and examined their habits. I discovered their Sunday routine, when men stayed at home wearing their new clothes or joined in barbeques at lunch. I discovered their festivals: Christmas, New Year's Day and Easter, as though they had never existed before. I watched their funerals and their happy occasions. The Christian funerals filled me with awe for their overwhelming blackness and the sight of priests marching ahead of the procession. Men, women and boys marched carrying wreaths. The participation of women in general society was a novelty to us, particularly unveiled women talking to men outside their homes without embarrassment. The lady in the

ground floor apartment near the Greek's shop used to drink her morning and afternoon coffee in her front yard along with her daughters whose complexions were stark white. She spoke to neighbours passing by and invited them for coffee. I wandered at the significance of this strange ritual that took that lady outside the walls of her home. There seemed to be no secrets, and an increased affinity between neighbours who lived like brothers and sisters. We did not take part in such rapport, which was in a way more akin to the village environment.

It was a period of mixing together and happiness. My new school was friendlier than the old one. It was quite multicultural, with its Christian and Moslem teachers and students, but I stayed in it for only two years. When I obtained my primary school certificate, I moved to the only public high school in the city. It was of a very high standard, matching the best private and missionary schools of the time and had highly qualified teachers, new buildings and spacious playing grounds.

During my first year there, a Christian and I shared the same desk. As a matter of fact, one quarter of the pupils in my class were Christians. They joined us from private and missionary schools, so their competence in French was greater than ours. All in all, our generation was lucky to have such a mixture of cultures and forms of education. There was a Catholic from *Zahlé*, a Druze from *Shoof*, a Chiite, Maronites from the neighbouring countryside and Orthodox Christians from the heart of the town. Our Islamic scripture teacher, delegated from Egypt, was surprised at the number of students who left the class during his first session at our school. Non-Moslems were not required to attend such classes.

High school, for me, represented a social place, with no room for my anthropological explorations.

Differences among students were minor. There was some effort on the part of those outsiders to the city to conceal their original identity, regional affiliations and particular accents. There was a common language among us, comprising terms and utterances familiar to everyone. Religious festivals were school holidays, allowing pupils to practise their faith and rituals in their family environment, not at school where there were no religious traditions.

Friendships were mixed, particularly in groups that adopted trendy fashions and western music. Moslems from the old town were more conservative, but these groups of mixed friendships were not based on religion, rather they were related to participation in the common emerging city model and following the most innovative fashion. Christians and Moslems who rigidly adhered to their original affiliations were exposed to our ridicule and criticism.

In our second year of high school we made an area called *Harat an-Nassara*[17] our street of leisure. We were a mixed bunch of Christian and Moslem, country and town people, but these classifications never bothered us or engaged our attention. *Harat an-Nassara* was a natural extension of one of the city's most original and ancient quarters. Its aspect might have changed in some outlying localities where missionaries established schools and monasteries, but its eastern part melted into an environment that had not been subjected to change. There, churches stood with their towers amongst a variety of architectural styles. But Christian dwellings were not restricted to the quarter that carried their name. For example, they inhabited districts such as *al-Hajjareen, al-Noori, al-Tarbiha* and *Suwaykat al-Khayl*. Their shops stood next door to the shops of

[17] The Christian Quarter.

people from other religions. Their dignitaries were acknowledged as part of the city community, not just the Christian one. For centuries, belonging to a city had been an important part of one's identity, regardless of one's religion.

We did not need to read history in order to choose our friends. Our friendships were a reflection of our times and the places from which we came.

Friday and Sunday

In my early school days, Thursday afternoon was the happiest of all times when at four o'clock we left school after four days of study. We prepared ourselves to receive a day off on Friday, return to school on Saturday and then have Sunday off. Thus was our weekly routine, which started sluggishly and then accelerated towards its end. Our daily routine started at six in the morning when we would wake up, finish what had been left over from our homework and make sure that we were at school ten minutes before eight. We had four classes between 7:50 and 12:20, with an half-hour break at 9:50. The break allowed us to have our sandwiches, purchase whatever we needed from the school shop, play or review our lessons. I did not eat anything during the break and wondered why my friends took their breakfast at school, particularly as we went home for lunch at midday, returning at two and then finishing the school day at four in the afternoon. It was a boring school routine and often extended by the time spent by teachers and caretakers in aggressively rebuking us.

Time passed slowly and rigidly. We wore uniforms as dark as coal, with white buttons. Our uniform was actually an apron or *maryool*. We carried plain leather bags with no ornament on either side. No school buses and no parents waited outside the school gates for their children. It was a safe and secure era when children were left to go to school on their own. Children knew all the shop owners on their route to school, and there was no sense of fear or isolation.

Getting out of the school gates was a noisy affair: three to four hundred students, whose ages ranged from six to fifteen, trying to leave at the same time. Older pupils from the higher classes were fewer in number, but their departure on Thursday afternoons was much noisier, indicating their inability to disguise their feelings of joy.

Schools were segregated; boys had their schools and girls had theirs. The reckless world of boys did not have any room for girls. As a matter of fact, girls played no part in our early youth. They were not part of our games, studies, conversations or dreams. Recklessness and sports were our two major aims, interrupted only by the toughness of our teachers, who disturbed our lives and annoyed us.

At four in the afternoon every Thursday, we went out of the school gate located at the foot of *Rifahia* Hill in the middle of the *souk*. We could either go southward to our homes, or northward to the heart of the market place, which consisted of groups of shops forming distinct markets, such as the shoe market or the perfume market. Some markets retained their Ottoman names, such as the *Bazirkan*. During spring, when the days started biting off part of the evening, we pursued colourful beetles and light-emitting insects near the fort overlooking the river. Often, I headed slowly towards home, passing by the *Tahham* and *Muallaq* mosques. *Al-Muallaq* mosque was situated above the market place. We used to pass under its unique building where some shops were located, including that of the plumber, who was the father of one of our classmates.

We could either play before reaching home or walk slowly. We preferred to take our bags home and return to the *hara* to play before sunset. We often neglected our homework until the next day, or did it hurriedly so as to enjoy the weekend without being

bothered by school duties. I did not like the school, its classes or homework, but fearing punishment forced me to do my best.

On Thursday evenings, we brothers and sisters stayed up late chatting, until we were subdued by sleep. There was no television or any special programme for children. Despite the late night, we used to wake up earlier than usual on Friday mornings, perhaps to enjoy every moment of the weekend, but more likely it was the early clattering inside the house that woke us up. To my mother, Friday was a day of work, possibly because she wanted to utilise the services of my sisters in household chores. Friday mixed pleasure with business, but we went to the *hara* to play with our mates, adding to the clatter of the market place already buzzing with business.

When I was about ten years old, I used to accompany my father to the midday Friday prayer. I don't know why my father chose me from amongst all my brothers to take to the *al-Tahham* Mosque, near the school. He might have taken them when they were my age in order to train them to participate in prayer. We took the same route I took to school, but walking with my father, who held my hand in his, gave me a sense of security that I did not feel on other days. He would often stop to shake hands and chat with a shop owner.

The steps that took us up to the mosque allowed me to glance at the *souk* and its shops, some of which were laid directly below the mosque. In the mosque I would sit near my father, positioned in a way that enabled me to watch, through a window, the shops, the vendors and passers-by in the *souk*. The clatter of the *souk* subsided when the muezzin announced the prayer and the imam started his Friday sermon.

On our way home some quietness engulfed the *souk*, though the shops still received customers. My father was the last customer to stop and buy a few things before the shops closed until the next morning.

Friday afternoon was different from the morning. A certain depression and boredom infiltrated our home and even the *hara*. We had to start preparing for the next day at school. Our elder brother was the one who usually took the initiative of reminding us of our obligations.

In the subsequent years my father ceased to accompany me to the Friday prayer. I started going on my own, accompanied by a few of my classmates. I did not go to the same mosque, but started frequenting the *Tarbiha* Mosque where one of our teachers preached. In following years we frequented the Grand Mosque, not to pray but to meet other students, professionals, shopkeepers and leaders of local political parties in preparation for a demonstration. Our numbers varied according to the occasion: patriotic, educational or a protest against the standard of living. We, the students of public schools, were at the core of all demonstrations. Demonstrators always gathered in the interior yard of the Grand Mosque until the Friday sermon was over. When worshipers came out, student and party leaders engaged in fiery (*hamassyia*) speeches, in contrast to the Friday sermon. In the morning we were busy organising matters and recruiting demonstrators. Then we would meet at the entrance or in the yard of the Grand Mosque, depending on our number. From there we headed to the inner lanes of the market place to attract more participants, whether they were passers-by or shop owners on the verge of closing their shops for the day. Some of these recruits would accompany us for only a short

distance. Others came with us in the demonstration from outside the market place to the main square of the modern city, then to the local Government House where we presented our varied demands. Then we would start for home, but often our zeal would be high and we would not return home directly, but go to our meeting places to evaluate our small victories.

One such place was *at-Tal al-Aali* Café, a small garden café with tall trees situated on a hill in the area of the modern city. The café had witnessed many eras and received men of consecutive generations who spent their time playing cards, smoking the hookah and drinking coffee. Different party supporters occupied different sections of that spacious café, which became the semi-official quarters for the group I belonged to during that time. We mixed together, talking politics, studying and playing cards, particularly during the days preceding examinations. The café was an ideal place for many students to prepare for exams.

We grew up on Fridays. Friday was no longer a day of sport, holiday or boredom. It became a day of meetings and struggle, particularly after the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel. We no longer followed parental instructions or paid much attention to our studies.

During my childhood, when I went out early on Friday mornings to play in the *hara* and when I went with my father to the mosque, Sunday seemed not to be significant in my life. It existed only as a day when the *hara* was quiet and I was home reviewing my lessons for the next day. On some Sundays my father took my elder brother and I to the barber's shop. Barbers used to open on Sundays like any other shop, but were closed on Mondays, not on Fridays.

I discovered Sunday at the age of ten, when we moved to our new neighbourhood, where Christians mixed with Moslems. In our old *hara*, Sunday, before

1960, was a day of work like any other day except that it was a school break for children. In our new street, my mother did not cease her habits and her home duties and disregarded the quietness of the early Sunday morning.

But gradually the new Sunday atmosphere did infiltrate into our domestic life, at the same pace as it did into the life and style of the city. Our new street awoke late and slowly on Sunday. The only shop in the street, owned by the Greek, closed all that day. The Greek man himself used to put on his navy blue suit and go to church with his daughters. I contemplated the rituals of Sundays and they seemed to me to resemble the rituals of a feast. We, however, did not participate in those rituals. Sunday for us was an opportunity to study and prepare for the next school day, but in later years, in the mid nineteen sixties, I devoted Sunday to watching the movies. I would meet with friends for the morning show at ten then return home at lunchtime. The afternoon was boring and depressing as we contemplated the long days of school to follow.

Sunday eventually became accepted in our lives and in the mood of the city as a holiday. Our school excursions and official celebrations were conducted on Sundays. Shops followed institutions in closing on Sundays. Cinemas scheduled their movies to start on Sundays.

These changes had explicit and implicit implications. Friday remained part of the old city, of the *souk* and the mosque, whilst the modern city was the stage for Sunday.

Time is meaningless outside space. Time takes its place in space, as if it runs in the streets, in the lanes and in the *souk*s. It then flows down into the homes, tinting them with its colours or casting its shadow over them. Friday morning flourished in the *souk*

surrounded by mosques. Everyone rushed there, despite most of the shops being closed. Then the *souk* turned empty in the afternoon, when families went on picnics or visited other families.

Sunday was associated with other places, mainly centred around the modern city square with its cinemas, cafés, deli shops and Armenian photographers who waited for their customers opposite the old Government House. The square attracted the youth of the inner suburbs of the old town who went in search of petty enjoyments. The streets of the modern city became theirs for a while, and then restored their normality the next day.

Time and days acquired new meanings. Friday was a national holiday and Sunday was a public holiday. Our city did not accede to Sunday until it acceded to the type of society created by the Government.

Friday lives in my mind with many meanings: work, prayer and entertainment all at the same time. It is a sequence of various and varied activities, unlike Sunday, which takes one meaning, that of rest and holiday. We are confronted with two systems, each with a particularity that embodies both present and past inheritance.

City and State

Despite its unfamiliarity, party politics had already invaded our locality during our first brush with "awareness". It was a double-edged issue: on the one hand, being a member of a political party was something to be proud of, and on the other it was a sin.

The first community and family impression of a relative joining a party was mixed with sympathy, due to his actions that bewildered others. He becomes entrapped in a dilemma that gives him the status of a victim, such as the imprisonment to which my brother was subjected during the first days of the revolt, where he was caught carrying political flyers by an army checkpoint. We waited three months before he was eventually released. This contradicts another scenario in which the inhabitants of our quarter burned the house of a party member because they considered him their enemy. This was a horrible scene that wounded the heart of our memory: men and boys brought out furniture from the house, poured petrol on it and allowed it to burn while locals watched silently. There was no place for empathy.

In general, belonging to a party was not acceptable both at the family and social levels. It was like a disability that you avoid mentioning, or a defect you try to hide, or a catastrophe that befalls you and you are unable to avoid. Party members on the other hand took pride in their belonging and adoption of certain ideologies. They felt pity upon non-partisans and their inability to discover the "truth" that became clear to them. They became sick

and tired of those who argued against what they considered common sense, and they commiserated with themselves by the fact that they discovered what others could not discover, and that victory was theirs at the end.

In truth, partisans were not large in number. They were a few scattered in this party or that, but they were very active and effective, attracting some admiration and a lot of suspicion. This made a partisan an entity that should be avoided, and a subject that should not be explored.

The first impression was that partisanship divided fathers and sons. The fathers were pious and religious, while the partisan sons adhered to party ideologies and had none of the parents' faith. This was in part impious and unorthodox, and in part a revolution of one generation against the other. A partisan abandons his family, tribe and religion, and becomes identified with his party's name. He becomes known in his quarters as "the communist", "the Nationalist" or "the Ba'thist". He is no longer the son of that family or the follower of that religion. This was the world of partisanship in its prime. In its early days, partisanship tore family relationships and created hatred among brothers in the same family. Party brotherhood became more important and replaced natural brotherhood.

The rivalry between partisanship and the state posed quite a danger. The state haunted partisans during trouble times without the ability of the people to protect or defend them. Public sympathy with partisans increased with the emergence of Arab nationalistic parties in the middle of the nineteen fifties. When the time of confrontation between the state and the people of the city arrived, partisans were ready and carried arms and led part of the revolt.

I was in my first year at school when in May 1958 the revolution erupted. Schools closed and pupils marched in the streets along with partisans and street youths. Shops were destroyed and burned. The army spread and closed the streets of the modern city. We were trapped in the old quarters that became as one. The city split in two. Barricades were erected to protect inhabitants of the old town from snipers. Arms became common in the hands of partisans who were mostly students in their graduation year, in addition to some youths and professionals. They carried machine guns, including the one given the brand name "Port Said" in commemoration of the tri-country (Britain, France & Israel) aggression against Egypt. "Popular Resistance" emerged, and within three months armed people were in charge of the inner quarters. The situation did not lack revolutionary ideology, but the traditions of "*qabadayat*", or "thugs" the city had almost forgotten surfaced again. The *qabadayat* were the traditional enemies of the state or any authority. In bygone times they used to impose their minor influences in the inner quarters of the old town, living on smuggling and kickbacks. The revolution refreshed their memories and their style of living for some time. They wedged themselves in the slogans of the revolution and its aims.

We were trapped in the inner quarters of the city due to imposed curfews or the danger associated with venturing in the streets. Our leisure times became limited to inside the house, or near it. We made wooden weapons that became more abundant than actual ones. We used lemons as hand grenades. Some boys used considerable skills in creating weapons as near as possible to the real ones. They mesmerised us, but the revolution took place in the summer, and being on holidays added to our boredom and fear,

particularly that the long hot summer nights were riddled by real exchange of fire.

Our city had its reasons for revolt. It was about a final show down with the government who only recently reconciled with its people after they kept their hostility towards it during The Mandate, and became disappointed with it during independence. Arab nationalistic partisanship, along with local leaders, youths and thugs were in some aspects the city's way of antagonising the state.

The summer ended and the revolt approached its final stages. Barricades were removed and the streets were opened again. The state returned wearing new attire and slogans, with the national anthem and pictures of the President of the Republic. We returned to school in the beginning of autumn when the city reconciled with the state.

The school principal, administrators and teachers did not take seriously the matter of students lining up at 7:50 every morning to sing the national anthem. The students also did not take it seriously either. We felt we were artificially doing something that was not born out of our conviction. This was why we, the students, were all smiles while the principal and his superintendent, who assumed the appearance of "leaders", frowned as they stood firm and upright looking into space.

The directive regarding the national anthem must had come from the Ministry of Education, which was at that time of the late nineteen fifties and early sixties active in representing the leanings of the state to build a 'strong nation for all citizens'. As a matter of fact, public schools were in their prime at the time, a condition that would last a decade before they fell into the same fate as that of the government leading them.

We sang the national anthem several times, then we all forgot about it: students, principal and superintendent. Our Grade 4 teacher, however, was in charge of the boyscout branch affiliated with the Ministry of Education. He was determined at activating national feelings among the youths. Our teacher sang all scout songs in all classes without exception. He urged his students to pay membership fees and buy scout uniforms in preparation for participation in camps. I personally did not pay any membership fees, wear uniform or go to any camp. But I did sing songs and learn about the noble mission of scouts. The scout movement seemed to me rather naive compared to what we were learning, at that early age, a patriotic vocabulary that infiltrated us from the partisan activities on never-ending occasions. By the time I moved to another school after my Grade 4, the rituals related to the national anthem became forgotten.

The state promoted its national symbols: the flag, the anthem and the picture of the president, in public departments and during special occasions, particularly during Independence Day. The state entered our city with its glory on Independence Day in 1962. The President himself attended, and I could see him from a distance occupying his prominent place inside a large marquee erected in the centre of the city, then unveiling a memorial in the middle of a big square. Grand celebrations were conducted in the stadium built only a few years before to testify to the interest of the state in its people. Schools sent their students to participate in these festivities. An ambulance, fire engines and a chopper acted a rescue mission, with some students cooperating with members of the civil defense force and the fire brigade. There was some admiration and bewilderment that prompted loud applause and

cheering, filling all corners of the stadium. All of this, however, did not charm us.

The state was planning something beyond celebrations. Some projects were planned. They started chopping trees in preparation for constructing the buildings for the international fair. Roads were built and some old quarters were demolished for the sake of widening the streets. Some thought that the government was deliberately doing this to allow tanks to enter the old quarters that were difficult to penetrate during the revolt.

There was some admiration for the work done by the government on the one hand, but on the other there was suspicion about its intentions. In the eyes of those who were older than us, the state was expanding and modernising its administration, but this was nothing to us compared with the slogans and ideas we believed in. The patriotic Arab nationalistic songs broadcast from other Arab stations were what captured our imagination and invoked our zeal.

The state was not absent from our minds, but its presence took a negative form. It is, however, ironic that this same state was the one we went to with our complaints when we participated in demonstrations starting from the inner suburbs out to modern ones until we reached Government House where the Mayor or his deputy addressed us.

Things went on as such for some time, with the confrontation between city and state, started during the days of our fathers and continued during our time, polarising many elements and taking different forms. We were very proud of our city of deep-rooted history, combining the essence of both culture and religion. It was not only a question of ancient mythical history, but this civil feeling was a common heritage among all similar cities. In the shadow of

changes occurring in a whole previous century, the children of the city continued their deep belonging to their city that was for them a vast space where they found their religion, language and home. This space was also a world drawn to its traditions, customs and particular history. It was difficult for the children of the city to accept the state to impose a belonging beyond their own. To them the city was equal to the state and even more. It was without doubt a conservative feeling, but it embodied a deep historical dialectics in which the feeling of belonging to an historical model was superior to the present. The city refused to substitute its identity by belonging to the idea of an "artificial" abstract state. This is why moving from the city, where society was one with its ideals, to a state which was at a layer above, had a price we paid for in a lot of metaphors, invoking contradicting values and many slogans and sacrifices.

Images
and
Thoughts

Images are an important component of our memories and thoughts. During special occasions and festivities, many calico posters carried pictures of certain identities next to short slogans written in red or black or both colours in large bold fonts. The terminology used was almost always the same despite the different occasions that seemed to arouse the same feelings. These occasions were too many, so perhaps there was a mix-up in the use of terms. There were funerals, anti-government demonstrations or celebrations of certain victories using the same means and instruments of expression.

My early memory goes back to countless occasions since 1956, or possibly that many of these scenes and memories were developed later. I only remember posters picturing busts of people, during both national and local celebrations. These were quickly hoisted during the night, by tying them to strings forming a rope hanging the posters between the two sides of the street. The whole arrangement formed a canopy covering our daily passage underneath. A canopy of posters, billboards and victory arches, depending on the importance of the occasion, to give us a sense of celebration during times such as the British-French-Israeli aggression on Egypt in 1956, the elections during the following year, the union

between Egypt and Syria in 1958, the Algerian independence and the revolution in Iraq… Ten years of posters during many occasions and glorious days, followed by another ten years of billboards and slogans.

The first poster that comes to mind was in colour, of a young military officer with blue eyes. The poster was present in many places in the streets and the city. It appeared in newspapers and was distributed by hand. It was a poster of an officer whose assassination summed up the whole Arab nationalist cause, and created a schism between us and some minorities we considered our rivals and enemies. Another poster of another officer wearing military uniform followed. This was an officer who was killed during the battle for the Suez Canal, an example of a heroism that can only be complete by martyrdom.

This was one way of expressing principles and ideas through human symbols of unification. This is why these posters found their place inside homes and shops, occupying prominent places on the walls. They were often framed by silver or golden frames, and sometimes surrounded by artificial flowers. The pictures often changed. Posters of local leaders were restricted to election times once every four years, giving way to posters of heroes who occupied a more lasting presence in the hearts and minds of people.

The habit of displaying pictures was recent in our environment. Families displayed photos of their elders in prominent places in their homes. The oldest of these photos go back to the beginning of the twentieth century when Armenian and French photographers introduced their massive cameras that stood on tripods and looked like metallic animals. Men, not women, usually had their pictures taken and exhibited at home. Some pious and religious people refused to have their pictures taken.

Generally, there was only one picture for a person taken over his lifetime. It became a valuable item, particularly after his death. It was placed over a cloth embroidered with silk and the whole thing framed in a glass and silver frame. During the nineteen fifties, Armenian photographers spread in the square of the modern city, sitting on high stools behind their tripod cameras.

Photographs and posters were not merely of politicians. The photograph started to occupy a position between the person and the person's soul; everyone wanted to have a commemorative photograph taken. This type of photographs entered the life of the city from its public square where mobile photographers spread offering their services to children, women and men who were eager to have their photograph taken. *Carpis* was the only photographer who kept an archive of over three thousand films of photographs he took between the end of the 1940's and the beginning of the 1960's. His son, who inherited the profession, showed me the films kept in their small yellow boxes and asked me what could he do with them. I had no satisfactory answer.

There is no doubt that the presence of unveiled women gave the public square a new setting: they came with their husbands or friends to have a commemorative photograph taken. It was often kept among dear items or framed and exhibited.

Photographs were valuable items, no matter what their subject was: kings, leaders or the elders of the family. Personal portraits only, without scenery or landscape occupied a prominent place at home as they were exhibited among Koranic verses and wall mats carrying pictures of Mecca and its Kaaba.

Pictures were valuable things deserving preservation and care. This is why the owner of the glassware shop at the entrance to *Khan al-Khayyateen* kept all the pictures he inherited from his father and those he came across. He was very proud of his collection that he felt possessed a great value, but equally generous in showing it to others. Every day he would hang the pictures around his shop and collect them again in the evening. Half a century of photographs, through which we deciphered the codes of history: the two sultans Abdulhamid and Mohammed Rashad, King Ahmad Fuad, Prince Faisal on his horseback and pictures of forgotten kings and persons. There were also imaginary characters such as *Antara bin Shaddad*. Some of the pictures were huge, representing the natural size of their subjects, while others were small. There were a few pictures of the shop-owner, wearing his moustaches, along with some known and unknown identities. Most of the photographs were in black and white, but some were coloured by hand.

Whenever possible, I used to deliberately make my way via the glassware shop so that I stop and contemplate the pictures. I could not identify the people in them, nevertheless I could have a sense of the time-span they represented. The unique ritual the shopkeeper followed in hanging the pictures with their wooden, silver and golden frames every morning only to remove them again when he closed, amazed me. He became known for this all around town. The villagers who came downtown used to stand in front of his shop to contemplate the pictures with bewilderment. He used to show a lot of satisfaction when one of the passers-by recognised his presence in the pictures, with his moustaches and Turkish calpac as if he had never departed the past.

Sheikh Hassan, the owner of the bookshop at the entrance to the perfume market, did not exhibit any personal photographs. He was a pious man whose beliefs made him reject the idea of photographs, and opt for his own slogans that bear no relation to any party or association. He wrote with white chalk on brown carton paper. Every slogan contained at least one word extracted from the word "Arab". He was a zealous Arabist, with the slogan of "United Arab States" and others dominating his work. On some occasions he wore one slogan on his chest and the other on his back and walked up and down the street repeating the slogan with a loud voice. His piety and religion were, however, stronger than his Arab nationalism. He alone observed the habit of *Takbir*[18] during the days that preceded the *Adha* feast. Every now and then and during times of prayers he wandered the street, calling people to the prayer.

His bookshop contained all sorts of books, and covered a century of Arab publishing. When the value of the contents of his bookshop became public, book collectors or sellers drained it of its most valuable and rare volumes. He then opted for lending novels and magazines to schoolchildren at a very low charge.

By the time I became a schoolboy, one poster carrying the picture of one person had replaced all other posters. It was displayed on all occasions such that any other poster vanished and became forgotten.

The picture of Gamal Abdul Nassir summarised it all. In black and white, in colour, in civilian dress, in military uniform, thinking or smiling, the picture was there in many sizes and places. I am not sure how one of these pictures in a silver frame was hung in a prominent place in our home. Some of my

[18] Exclaiming '*allahu akbar*' or 'god is great' in a prayer-like voice.

brothers went to Damascus when Nasser personally visited Syria upon announcing the United Arab Republic, comprising Syria and Egypt. Once my mother took me with her on a family visit to Homs, Syria, when I was only seven. She bought one of Nasser's coloured posters for me when we stopped at the border.

During the year Nasser visited Damascus, *Eid al-Fitre* occurred during spring. A timber model[19] of Nasser was erected in the public square. My brother and I went to have our pictures taken next to the model. The photograph was a source of our joy and pride, showing it to whoever came to visit us.

We had no other pictures on our walls. No landscapes or portraits. One picture moved with us from home to home. Only the Koran in its cloth case was hung over my father's bed.

Our early upbringing was among the pictures and slogans of Arab nationalism, and its rhetoric in the media and poems recited using loudspeakers during festivals, inside closed doors or in public squares. Slogans attracted us due to the ease of memorising them, particularly that we often chanted them as we cheered during demonstrations and festivals. We inhaled Arab nationalism at home, inside our classrooms, in the district and the street we passed from home to school. Some of our teachers were active partisans. They were few in number but their influence was noticeable. They spoke little about patriotism, probably due to our young age, but a few words were enough, particularly that they turned a blind eye to our strikes and absence from school during national events.

We were Arabs, but also Moslems deep down. Everything depended on how priorities were set.

[19] This would have usually been a life-size cardboard display.

Parents mixed Arabism with Islam in a similar way to the glassware shopkeeper who mixed pictures of Ottoman sultans with princes of the Arab revolt, ignoring that the revolt was by the princes against the sultans. Or in a way similar to Sheikh Hassan, the bookshop owner, in his making Arabism part of his piety and faith.

Arab nationalism was our natural environment and an extension to our beliefs. It infiltrated all aspects of our life: family, neighbours, markets, school and the city. It influenced subsequent generations who felt that it was relevant. The generation of the sons and daughters wanted to give it priority on a national level. This created misunderstanding between parents and children about which slogans and expressions to adopt. However, the one picture of Nasser continued to be a guarantee for the continuation of some consensus.

Our revolt after the 1967 Arab defeat was not aimed at Arab nationalism but at its symbols that undermined its essence. This is why I, with my own hands, removed Nasser's picture off the wall that became bare for the first time for over a decade.

We wanted to replace pictures by thoughts and analysis, particularly objective analysis. We spent our days in meetings full of discussions, and our nights reading into the depth of books. We carried our thoughts and expressions to peoples' gatherings and groups leaving behind all pictures and symbols, or thus it seemed to us.

It was not possible to tie thoughts and books by strings from one side of the street to the other. New pictures and slogans had to replace the old ones. These were now glued to walls all over the city.

Poster upon poster covered the walls of the city and covered one another. Colours were mixed, and it became difficult to distinguish pictures from symbols

and thoughts in that odd combination on the walls of the city.

City Streets

I knew the old city and its long *souk* ardently. The souk connected its two sides. Many lanes, alleys and internal narrow streets branched off this long thoroughfare. We, the young boys, were able to discover our way through those dark serpentine lanes to the *Qal'a*,[20] the *Mallaha*[21] or the *Dabbagha*[22] on the riverbank. Roofed souks linked large spaces surrounded by houses with front-yards.

We mostly frequented the the Qal'a during spring. It was separated from our school by roofed pathways and stairs. This exercise gave us the feeling that we were entering and leaving houses without anyone discovering us. In the spacious yard in front of the huge gate of the Qal'a, we used to play and catch coloured beetles. The high walls of the Qal'a incited us to play war games using bows and arrows, but we did not give much thought to the impact of long history on these souks and innermost lanes. We had no conception of the many generations that dwelt in those spots. This varied life-style, with its intricate pattern of intermingling worlds without clear-cut boundaries attracted us. It was a mixture of people, professions, odours and voices. The souk was

[20] The citadel
[21] A name of a location indicating the possibility of its original use as
a salt mill.
[22] The tannery.

our environment where we lived and took things for granted.

As boys of the hara (not as schoolboys), we were attracted to the other side of the city, particularly during spring times when we could cross Old Beirut Road through groves of olive trees to the Boulevard, the new highway to Beirut under construction. We would stop at the point where a bridge was being constructed.

Our journey would stop at the outskirts of the city and we would return to its inner quarters. I used only to visit the modern centre of the city during occasions, festivities or consultations with doctors who established their clinics outside the old souk in high-rise edifices.

In years that followed, when I was able to go to school on my own, I was able to take several alternative routes. Some passed parallel to the old souk, and others passed through the main square of the modern city. I generally chose the street full of printing houses. It connected to Rahbat Street that led to Nejmeh Square. This is the environment where I had originally been raised. Crossing Zahiria Street, I used to meet the girls' high-school pupils wearing their olive uniforms. In the straight Rahbat Street, I used to meet the girls from the Rahbat[23] School wearing their blue uniforms. The school's high wall extended over three quarters of one side of the street. The school gate was in the middle of that high wall. I used to walk slowly whenever I arrived at the start of the street, allowing myself the opportunity to examine the faces of the school girls among whom I soon found myself searching for one particular face

[23] *Rahbat* is Arabic for "nuns". Some schools were referred to as "Rahbat" schools because they were run by nuns, even though the official name of the school could have been different.

which attracted my attention. Meeting her every morning became my main concern. She used to leave her home at 7:20 and arrive at school by 7:30.

I fell in love with the girl from the Rahbat School. My source of information about her was a classmate of mine. During holidays, I frequented her quarter in order to have a glimpse of her. I took all routes leading to her home, and became an expert on all pavements, shops and faces.

Her street became familiar to me. I expanded my circle of exploration arriving at her building from a different direction every time: the Rahbat Street, the opposite direction whereon Alajam Street was located and even from the Daftardar Square linked to the old souk eastward. My passion about her was intensely associated with my love for hanging about in the streets and the lanes surrounding her home. I strengthened as much as possible my friendships with boys from her locality to give me enough excuses to be present there.

It was a first love that I did not know what to do with, particularly as she did not take notice of my roving. I was merely one of the many boys who used to crowd her street.

I gradually started to forget the Rahbat School girl when I turned my attention to a neighbour. She was the most beautiful girl in our street. She had a kind of a Grecian beauty and a touch of mystery I was unable to determine. For a full summer I stayed at home. If I went out, it was for a very short period. My mother thought I was sick, or very depressed. I used to watch her from a window that overlooked her balcony. We exchanged glances, gestures and a silent love. When we met in the street, we muttered some greeting or words and shivered and blushed. Maybe she expected that I would reveal my love to her first, but I dared not.

I could not dare stand in front of her in the middle of the street and express myself in a clear voice. I could not dare follow her to her building, to hold her hand and tell her that I loved her. I was afraid, particularly of the ridicule of my friends in the street or at school. The culture reigned in our male circle that every boy would express his passion for more than one girl, sometimes in a very obscene way, by recounting some made-up stories about their sexual adventures. If we saw a boy talking to a girl in a corner of a street, he became subject to ridicule. This is why we avoided befriending our female relatives to avoid talking to them in the street, as if talking to the opposite sex would degrade our manhood.

The possible relationship between boys and girls during our teenage years was the subject of much contradictory feelings. On the one hand, it was a source of pride. On the other, it was a source of derision. A young man's feeling of pride in such a relationship is equated by his fear of his friends who might debase his passion and his involvement with one lover. When the relationship becomes serious, the youth in question will be the subject of pity.

I forgot our Grecian-faced neighbour as I did the Rahbat School girl. I forgot her amidst my friendship with mates, a relationship of boys who compensated for the acquaintance of girls by merely talking about them. I was no longer able to stay at home awaiting my neighbour's presence on her balcony. I went out continuously. We followed schoolgirls in every street and from any school at any time. I met girls whose images matched the one I had in mind about my ideal girl. I was particularly attracted to the girls from the

American School and from the Rahbat of Ibrin School. I became familiar with the routes of school buses that took the girls from their homes to school. Many girls attracted our attention in a short period of time. We exchanged information about the times they left their homes, the times of their return from school, their names, their ages, their hobbies and other information.

This is how I discovered and explored the modern side of the city. Streets not previously known to me, discovered mainly thanks to my personal efforts and to those of my friends. Our main stage was that long street which had been cut through the citrus orchards in the beginning of the twentieth century, out of which many other streets branched. These were quiet, elegant and clean streets in which all the girls we admired and sought were present. This was the only thing we searched for in those "female" streets.

The passion for our phantom girls was confused with our passion for those streets we roamed, window-shopping to pass time. We memorised all names, people and places, and became experts on shops, buildings, their inhabitants and visitors who competed with us for the same purpose.

We aimlessly roamed the place, all day long and in all seasons. Neither winter rain nor the humidity of the summer stopped us. The most beautiful period of the year, however, was during the time schools resumed their activity in October, as well as during the short spring season.

All of my imaginary girlfriends who were the same age as me, had short names. They were easily pronounced names, indicating the fervent struggle for modernity. Girls were called "Nada", "Hiba", "Hana", "Zena", "Rima" and "Maha". These were names with the same musical sounds, indicative of a

generation that was going to immerse itself in the modernity and openness of the nineteen sixties.

I spent three to four happy teenage years in tracking the girls. This allowed me to get expert knowledge of the streets of the modern city. But all of a sudden everything was put to an end. I became preoccupied with student activities and with my new partisan life. I distributed pamphlets, organised demonstrations and strikes. I spent many hours in meetings that seemed endless, meetings without the presence of any girls.

It was not merely a change in interests, but also a change in norms and ideas. We neglected our appearance and stopped listening to western music. We substituted the life that was as naive as our relationship with girls with a more serious one, or so we thought as we embarked on chain-smoking, long-term meetings, thick books and staying awake until the early hours of the morning. We grew up many years within a few months between one autumn and the beginning of the summer that followed it.

It was not simply a change in habits and ideas, but also a change of places. Partisanship would not have survived in those open wide streets. We had to operate in old poor public streets at the edge of the city. This made me discover new areas in which I had never set foot before. The outer stretches of the city and its innermost streets were the stage for communications, meetings and establishing contacts with workers and professionals.

It was a harsh partisan life that severely excluded women in order to maintain its revolutionary purity. We could not bear that so we made frequenting "school gates" part of our activities. But our female comrades came from public schools rather than the schools we used to like. They were less elegant and took less notice of their make-up.

In reality, all parts of the city became our stage... Some streets were for our struggle and others for hanging about. Male streets and others for the females. Poor streets and affluent streets. Places, streets, quarters and cafés are like memories. You frequently resort to some of them, others you only recall occasionally and the rest you forget forever.

The Transition to the Sixties

The nineteen sixties started and finished early in our city. They lasted eight or nine years between 1958 and 1967, i.e. they fell between a local revolt and a regional war. They were one way of dividing time into eras between fateful events. Writers of history take care of these events that are basically focal points in the memory of two or three of the city's generations. These events take a special meaning in the life of the city, because each one of them can be realised differently by the different people remembering it. The different interpretations of the same event accumulate as if they add more strata over those of the buildings, suburbs and streets.

There were other events that had taken place in the previous two decades but lingered on in the memories of the nineteen sixties. Every suburb or family seemed to have its own version of the same event that was relived by consecutive generations as if they were present when it occurred. For example, the incident in 1947 that relates to the famous leader *al-Qawiqji* and the flood of the river in 1955. People like myself who were born during the first incident and were in their early years of life during the second, can see the details of either incidents as if they were there when the incidents happened.

Every decade registers at least one distinguished event, but there are some decades that are crammed with events, preserved in the memory as landmarks for the turning of time.

Surely, when history quickly or slowly passes an event, it intensifies a group of unseen or unread patterns. The *al-Qawiqji* incident was a crossing

between the effects of war in Palestine, where he was the leader of the *Inqaz Army*,[24] and the complexity of Lebanese politics, contradictions in local leaderships and their fights in the city. The return of the leader of the Inqaz Army to his city caused a massacre that tinted the following years. The effect of the flood, however, was of a different nature: it triggered the turnabout of the people of the city over their historical line demarking their traditional space, and their flight outside it.

The revolt of 1958 represented, for the city's population, a belated last confrontation with the authorities. It was a confrontation with the remnants of The Mandate model in society and state. The 1958 revolt had its intersections. It came at the climax of nationalistic resurgence. It expressed regional problems and the involvement with their conflicts. This is why the "fuel" for the revolutionaries came from the *Iqlim ash-Shamali*.[25] The revolt was also a Lebanese event because it witnessed a confrontation among leaders of the different sects. At the depth of local consciousness, the city, with its people's resistance and army defiance, was reclaiming its recent and particular history. The revolt was like a long strike over the summer period. Public utilities came to a halt and people stayed in their homes as they did during the forty-day strike of 1936. In their confrontation with armoured vehicles, they were rekindling the memory of the 1943 battle of independence, when French tanks ran over some demonstrators in the main square and its surrounds. There is a revenge of sorts when mass subconsciousness associates events that belong to different times.

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[24] Army of Deliverance.
[25] Northern Territory, namely Syria as it was referred to during the unity with Egypt under the United Arab Republic.

The city said all it wanted to say during the summer of 1958, and put its words into action, as if it was letting out a congestion of many previous years. When the *ahdath*[26] were over, the page was turned and the whole thing was forgotten. It was as if the city had avenged itself, and followed that by a long-term reconciliation with the *fait accompli* that resulted from those events.

The end of troubles marked the end of two types of isolation: the isolation imposed by confrontation during the summer months, and a chronic isolation dating back to a long past, embraced by the city as if it were its only fate, but now the city decided to abandon it as if it was leaving its fate to take care of its own fate.

We were at the verge of recognising ourselves within the auspices of state during the modernisation of the early sixties. State and modernisation were, anyway, linked. The state was the door to modernity and the road to it. Later, its name will be associated with roads, networks, planning, electricity and establishing organisations and institutes. All of this happened in the early nineteen sixties.

Planning and building straight roads was an important factor in allowing the old city to be unleashed. It had a decisive role in the distribution of wealth and the spreading of modern constructions. Land prices rose gradually as the land became for building rather than planting citrus trees.

The inhabitants went out from inside their city to the modern quarters inhabited by a majority of people who arrived in the city during The Mandate or independence. When the army withdrew from the city in the autumn, the city symbolically owned the

[26] "Events"- the other name given for the revolt.

modern quarter and considered it its quarter after a long period of caution against it.

If the state was the door to modernity, opening this door remained a local issue. Families rushed to leave the old for the emerging new, and buildings in the modern quarter flourished. This happened gradually and experimentally, first to the outskirts of the old town then to more modern streets. The fever of moving prevailed, i.e. moving to where the flood poses no threat. This was where the distinguished relationship between the flood and the revolt as means of abandoning two systems, the natural and the social, came from. The two events contributed for the city to depart itself and its history.

The people left their old town and abandoned homes where their parents and grandparents had lived for generations. Those who could afford it, and those who obtained compensations for their lands after the flood or after road building or the establishment of the international fair, all sought this change equally. A change in the standard and style of living came about. This led to a partial change in understanding wealth and the method of its utilisation. Wealth was revealed after people tried to carefully conceal it. It became a value, subject to exchange, utilisation and enjoyment.

This departure was a factor of time rather than space. The displacement occurred within a few hundred metres, but the move was from an era to another. It was from the time-style of the Inner city, i.e. the timing of the inner souk that closed in the afternoon and before sunset, to a timing created by departments, banks and movie shows and evening cafés. It was a departure from the nineteen fifties burdened with the past to the nineteen-sixties promising with the future.

This was accompanied by building new roads inside the old city without anyone caring about the demolition of seven-century-old Mamluki buildings. In addition, many roads were built amidst the fields: straight, wide, unhindered streets. There was a wide two-lane boulevard that cannot be compared to the old winding narrow lanes. The new streets opened the way to an expansion in modern buildings that attracted the inhabitants of the old town. Demolitions increased around the river area where along its banks the Mamluki city once reigned supreme. It was a revenge of sorts, aimed at widening the riverbed to accommodate ten times its size. Two main streets were built, each on one side of the river. The authorities were excessive in their demolition practice. The inhabitants turned a blind eye, due to their wish of departing the past with its traditions and humid streets (that actually had a pleasant atmosphere), to the wide streets with their concrete multi-story buildings. The coppersmiths market was removed, and the echoes of their working hammers were lost forever.

This affair was not without courage, not only in removing the old streets and souks, but also in changing the features of the environment and manipulating it. It was as if modernity was synonymous with power and will. The construction of the port required reclaiming a large coastal area by landfill. The waterfront area became a collection of buildings, establishments and flat roads. The beach became distant from the railway station. The Crusader tower lost its function of watching the sea that disappeared as if it never had been. The whole thing seemed like a change of the map of the sea, a manipulation of nature. It was as if passing to the age of the modern world required such a sacrifice as a minimum condition. We all built our hopes on the

benefits that our city would gain from building the port which would receive ships from every other Mediterranean port, and other faraway places, bringing with them prosperity and allowing us to enter the new age equipped with its appropriate tools, conditions and requirements.

It was a unique feeling to walk on what was a short while before deep seawater. We wandered a lot in that space that kept expanding day after day, and made it our field of play. Families came during holidays to have fun and explore the consequences of the bulldozers' actions. We were able to go further over the rocky head covered with cement and crossed the water like a straight line. When we reached the end, we would watch the city that rested at the distant slope, separated from us with a deep sea awaiting the arrival of ships.

We witnessed the arrival of the first cargo ship, and we climbed on board to its towers and cabins, and so did many other boys who came for fun. Shortly afterwards we were prevented from entering the port by a wire-gate. We countered this by stealthily entering from the side of a nearby swimming pool, using the rocks that ran across the stretch of the headland.

On the other side of the city they started chopping trees, completing the environmental change that allowed the accommodation of more buildings. Thousands of citrus trees were uprooted, leaving a barren land before the concrete buildings were erected promising openness and participation in an international move. These were the promises of the beginnings of the nineteen sixties.

Beirut was the role model. It was the model of modernity and belonging to the State. Our discovery of Beirut as the centre of politics, business, finance and education had been recent. Access to Beirut

improved, thanks to two bus companies that were established at the time to carry students, public servants and professionals. The services were popular with many commuters leaving to pursue signing official papers, medical consultations, shopping, hanging about, watching the movies or spending the evening. The busiest times for transport to Beirut were Sunday afternoon to allow people to spend the evening having fun in the capital, Monday morning to take university students back to the city after the weekend and Friday afternoon returning students and others home for the weekend. The Burj Square in Beirut and the Tal Square in Tripoli were the two centres for these trips between the two cities. Returning home at the end of the week was a ritual of longing and belonging to a world that still kept its major characteristics. Access to Beirut also took place through television that was established in the early nineteen sixties. Through television, Beirut was presented as a place of modernity, fun and affluence.

Change took several paths. The school became a means of modernisation, a role it undertook since the nineteen forties, but during the sixties, the public school became a fertile medium for social integration, based on mixing between the countryside and the city, and among students of different religious sects. The movies, our second school in those days, played a similar role with its large elegant halls, particularly those located in the heart of the city. There were two types of cinemas: the first carried foreign names and showed European and American movies. The second carried Arabic names and showed Egyptian movies or what had already been shown in the other movies. Cinemas were frequented by boys in the afternoon. For us, the movie in the late nineteen fifties was the movie of bewilderment: an imaginary affair that did not relate

to reality in any way. Its heroes were the likes of Tarzan and Hercules. It took us to the worlds of Troy, the jungles of Africa or to Baghdad with Sindbad. In the nineteen sixties, the cinema identified more with our life, feelings and dreams. It became the movie of our daily life- taking us to a world we thought was the world of adventure as lived by the west in the stories of love and opulence. It represented the world of people who resembled us, or that of people we liked to resemble. The cinema started having a deeper effect on our life, behaviour and feelings. In the middle of the nineteen sixties, the cinema became a local social ritual. Youths of both sexes dated during the afternoon shows. Husbands and wives went to the evening shows, after nine and stayed out till midnight. A new schedule emerged for the city and its nightly active rhythm. Sandwich, cigarette and some grocer shops stayed open until after the end of the evening shows. Taxis awaited the last patrons to return them home.

Cafés adapted their existence in harmony with movie shows, and eventually developed their own rhythm. Three or four cafés opened near cinema houses in the years following 1958. Others opened later in areas of urban expansion. Patrons changed between the morning and the evening. The café was a meeting place for city and country, crowded with morning coffee drinkers before they left for work, but the cafés of the nineteen sixties adopted modern habits, catering for drinks and western meals during lunch and dinner, and welcoming patrons from both sexes. They launched Saturday night parties where women, without realising it, participated in the modernisation of this city scene that changed its habits and norms.

Meaningful changes occurred in the direction of modernising the city's features. The Mayor, who left

a remarkable reputation, was strict in keeping order. He prohibited mule-driven transport carriages, paving the way for the age of taxis. But deeper changes occurred, such as the disappearance of homemade bread in the early sixties. Housewives used to prepare the daw at home and male children would take it to the bakeries, but now the whole process took place at the bakery. Initially, the city dwellers loathed this ready bread, but urban development and the hasty movement from the old town to modern suburbia abolished the habit of homemade bread, partially liberating women from some burdens.

The veil retreated with this move outside the old town. In their old quarters, where family, relatives and neighbours watched, women could not dare unveil their faces. Moving to another area provided an avenue for reconsidering one's priorities. The new generation of girls uncovered their faces and lifted the rest of their veil completely. The change was fast, and the social scene changed in an amazing way.

It was a new order of values that included the way of life. But inside these changes, the social institutions meaningfully kept their stability. Civil record departments still associated one with one's parents' place of birth. It linked later generations with quarters and streets they had never known. It was also meaningful that the family as a unit preserved itself as a social and moral institution. It was a peaceful move to modernity, allowing the city dwellers to assimilate in the new guise after comprehending and adapting to it, without causing real damage in their steadfastness.

The nineteen sixties was the period of reconciliation of tradition with modernity. This can only be understood in the light of what was in the past and what followed. During The Mandate,

modernity was imposed hastily in a society that resisted an expression that was robbing it of its identity. During the sixties, there was some truce and harmony between the different models and contradicting values. It was a happy period in the eyes of those who considered what happened was parallel to advancement, optimism and hope. But the sixties passed quickly: they came early and maybe finished prematurely.

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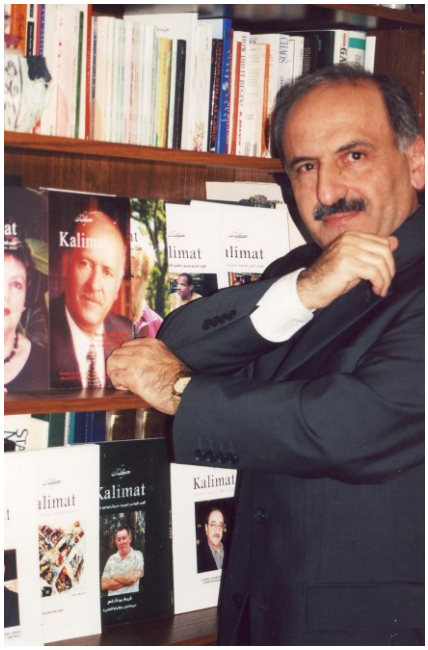


He has many publications and hundreds of translations in English and Arabic, in various fields. His literary translations include a book of Australian poetry with poems for seventy-nine poets translated into Arabic and published in Damascus in 1999. More recently, he co-translated, with Noel Abdulahad, two of Shawki Moslemani's poetry collections into English, published by *Kalimat* in November 2004.

His first literary publication in a recognised journal (in Arabic) appeared when he was only fourteen. Later he published some short stories, several articles and more recently some political articles that appeared in an-Nahar, a leading Arab newspaper in Beirut. Over the past five years, he has contributed many articles and translations in both English and Arabic, to *Kalimat*.

Nahhas is a science graduate of the American University of Beirut and Hull University in England. He worked in the marine and environmental research and consultation areas for over twenty-five years.

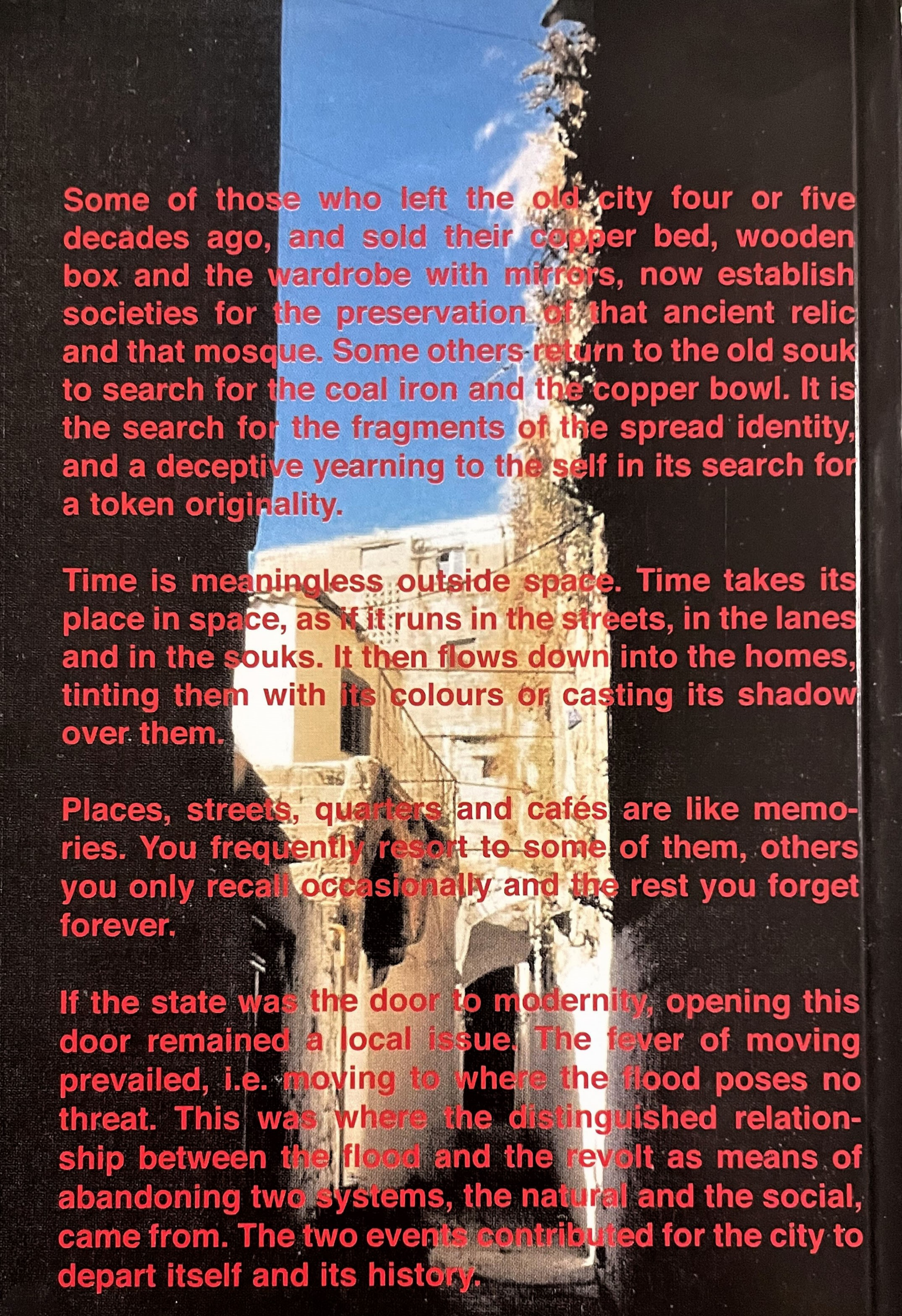
Some of those who left the old city four or five decades ago, and sold their copper bed, wooden box and the wardrobe with mirrors, now establish societies for the preservation of that ancient relic and that mosque. Some others return to the old souk to search for the coal iron and the copper bowl. It is the search for the fragments of the spread identity, and a deceptive yearning to the self in its search for a token originality.

Time is meaningless outside space. Time takes its place in space, as if it runs in the streets, in the lanes and in the souks. It then flows down into the homes, tinting them with its colours or casting its shadow over them.

Places, streets, quarters and cafés are like memories. You frequently resort to some of them, others you only recall occasionally and the rest you forget forever.

If the state was the door to modernity, opening this door remained a local issue. The fever of moving prevailed, i.e. moving to where the flood poses no threat. This was where the distinguished relationship between the flood and the revolt as means of abandoning two systems, the natural and the social, came from. The two events contributed for the city to depart itself and its history.

Khalid Ziadé



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