

Shafik and Wadi' Tarazi

Two Brothers Fighting for Gaza on Several Fronts



By Saleem Zoughbi

I remember standing on the sand in front of the UN Beach Club in Gaza while a dear friend was gazing at the sea. Looking far beyond the waves, she murmured, “You know, this sea has witnessed true solidarity, resistance, and faith among the Palestinian people living in Gaza, not only after the 1967 occupation but throughout the last century.” She was thinking of individuals such as the Tarazi brothers, two committed and persevering personalities who showed that our people refuse to disappear. They made sure that the Zionist dream that Israeli generals have entertained for years, namely that they may wake up one morning to find that the Mediterranean has drowned Gaza forever, is just that – a dream.

Shafik was born in 1906; his brother Wadi' two years later. They lost their father at an early age. Since childhood, Shafik showed intelligence and a clear, strong personality. He grew up in Gaza, studied at the Friends School in Ramallah, then moved to Beirut to attend the American University of Beirut but had to come back after one year to help support his family. After working one year in Palestine, Shafik moved to Cairo and completed his university studies at the American University of Cairo, majoring in mathematics, physics, and philosophy. Immediately after graduation, Shafik returned to Palestine and resumed teaching at Ramallah's Friends School, eventually becoming the school's deputy.

Wadi' also studied at the Friends School in Ramallah, but he was able to go to the United States to complete his undergraduate degree. Upon his return, he joined Birzeit College – at that time still a school – as a teacher. He soon

proved to be invaluable and an efficient teacher and administrator, so he was appointed the school director.

In 1942, Shafik and Wadi' decided to open a school in Gaza and founded Gaza College. It became one of Palestine's six national, nongovernmental, and not-for-profit schools and offered all classes up to matriculation.

During his studies in Cairo, Shafik became best friends with Abdul Qader Husseini, the Palestinian national resistance leader. Shafik was elected as leader of the Palestinian students, strongly supported by Abdul Qader. Their close friendship continued until the day in 1948 when Abdul Qader was martyred by the Israeli Zionist militia.

Shafik sustained an active national role throughout the 1940s. He formed a network of concerned nationals and coordinated the resistance in Gaza with Haj Amin Husseini. As Jaffa was falling in 1948, Shafik and a few community nationalists worked hard to support the brave Egyptian commander Fuad Sharaf who disobeyed his orders to withdraw troops back to the international borders. Moving outside of Gaza, Shafik fought the battle of Beit Hanoun, thus saving Gaza from falling to the Zionists in 1948.

The Tarazi brothers soon realized that their responsibilities to educate their community, society, and people had transformed into a much larger and more solemn task. They embarked on an endeavor to keep Gaza strong despite the terrible catastrophe that faced the Palestinian people. By soliciting support from China, Europe, and Arab popular parties, they played a significant role in sustaining Gaza's security and social life and engaged as strong motivators for educational development and growth in Gaza.

They also held rallies in Gaza and in other countries in support of the Palestinian cause, involving international supporters.

After the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, the Israeli military's department in charge of overseeing the education of Palestinians issued new regulations for all schools in Gaza and the West Bank. Shafik, however, refused to abide by this order. He argued that the laws that had been valid in Palestine before 1948 should be kept and that Palestinian political presence should continue. As a result, the college was subjected to extreme restrictions that aimed to gradually enforce the Israeli military law that had been imposed on the occupied territories. However, until the passing of Shafik in 1984, the college had no choice but to accept permits from the Israeli military that were contrary to the legislation issued by the Egyptian government after 1948, while in the West Bank Jordanian law had replaced the originally British and Ottoman laws of pre-1948. While these laws had not been specifically tailored to the Palestinian situation, they were more friendly towards Palestinians than the suppressive laws passed by Israel.

It is no doubt that the presence, legacy, and dedication of the Tarazi brothers during historic periods in Palestine greatly helped to sustain the resilience and strength of Palestinian Arab society in Gaza and strengthened its commitment to Palestinian nationalism.



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