My Grandfather Was Not a Hero

It must have been the early 1970s. I remember one evening when my grandmother's house in Bethlehem was full of people who came to congratulate her on the release of her son Husni who had just been freed from a Jordanian prison. Husni was imprisoned prior to 1967 by Jordan for being a communist and an activist. At some point there was some extra commotion in the house. I could hear my grandfather raising his voice and then some laughter. It seems that the mayor's daughter had sat in my grandfather's armchair and after his repeated polite requests to unseat her, he lost his temper and almost shouted at her, saying that this was his seat! My short-tempered grandfather was in his eighties and as a true Nazarene, he often used cuss words!

Elias As'ad Haddad, my grandfather, was born in Nazareth sometime in the 1880s. After he finished school, he travelled to Istanbul to pursue his education. He then caught typhoid and had to abandon his dreams and return to Palestine. He worked for a while and then married Shafika, my grandmother, and had four children. Hoping to realize his dream, my bookworm grandfather studied law in Jerusalem (at night) and became a lawyer, practicing until he retired in the 70s. A turning point in his life came during a football match pre-1948: Tewfic Haddad, his youngest son, collapsed and died. Apparently, Tewfic had a heart problem but had not informed his parents. The close-knit society of West Jerusalem, where my grandparents were living then, was in shock. My grandmother wore black for ten years.

As I grew up, my almost-perfect image of my grandfather was eventually tarnished as I comprehended more about his work with the British Mandate police force. Among other tasks, his responsibilities included confronting the Palestinian freedom fighters who were fighting the British Mandate which was aiding the Zionist gangs. Although he was compassionate to the imprisoned freedom fighters (and often fed them from his own pocket, as I was told), my grandfather was tough and followed British orders to a tee. In other words, much to my dismay, my grandfather can be called a collaborator. And with all his achievements, which included being awarded an exemplary medal by the British forces along with only other person, he was no hero, given that he did not support the freedom fighters.

The interesting twist in this is that my grandfather was never chastised for his acts. I can only deduce that the freedom fighters didn't carry a lot of societal weight then and that despite Zionist threats, Palestinians were benefitting from the relative affluence brought by the British Mandate, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Dido, as we called my grandfather, aged with dignity and had a beautiful funeral.

Long Live Palestine

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Publisher

