

The Monthly

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ADMA NASSIF TOPPLES THE CONFESSSIONAL SYSTEM



Perhaps she has seen it all: the Baghdad Pact and Gamal Abdel Nasser's era, the blooming of new ideas in young Arab generations, the emergence of the tribes of Hashid, Bakil, Taghlib and Tamim, and Al Qardawi and Al Jazeera, the widening schism between the "Sunni" and the "Shia'a", the division of Sudan and Yemen and Iraq and potentially Syria, the rise of Erdogan who is sitting on Iskenderun and more and Netanyahu who is sitting on Palestine and more, the bankruptcy of Egypt and splurging Qatar that is to spend \$100 billion on a football game, to Abu Dhabi, who is oblivious to the rights of its migrant workers but is highly concerned about human rights in Syria, to the Ba'ath party's tedious rhetoric since it gained power in Iraq in 1968 until 2003 and in Syria since 1963, to Ghazi Kanaan and Rustum Ghazaleh ruling with Lebanese Zua'ama who now curse them, to the dissipation of the SSNP that seems to be always fascinated by the genius of Kanaan and Ghazaleh and their heirs, to the proud confrontation with Israel in 2006, to the demise of Ben Ali and Mubarak, and until her last breath in May 2011, Adma Nassif succeeded in bringing down the confessional system.

Adma Youssef Eliyya Nassif was born (Christian) in 1930 in Miqlless, now Syria. She grew up in Mar Marita near Al Hosn fortress in Wadi Al Nasara. Had patriarch Howayek (who feared an Orthodox majority) agreed, General Gouraud would have managed to include the Wadi within Greater Lebanon and Mar Marita would have been, along with Homs, Tel Kelekh, Wadi Khaled and Trablous, in "our glorious country of co-existence."

She was imprisoned in Mazzeh in Damascus and in Fayyadiyyeh and Al Mir Bachir in Beirut. But she was always free. Adma and Nehmeh Hamadeh (born Shia'a in Hermel, now Lebanon) "made a pact" to achieve a higher cause worthy of their existence. They dreamt of a nation and "generations that are yet to be born." Nehmeh Hamadeh was a revolutionary in his society, confession and tribe and Adma was his partner even before they met.

Adma Nassif toppled the confessional system without using Twitter or Facebook and she did it 4 times: first in 1953, when she believed in a secular and unified Levant, second when she married Nehmeh Hamadeh in both the Christian and Islamic traditions in 1957, third when she kept working and dreaming of a secular unified nation even after the troubles with her party (SSNP) and fourth when she was told that Islam was the way to rest next to her husband who is buried in the Shia'a Hamadeh Cemetery in Hermel and she answered: Why not?

Adma witnessed a time where accusations of heresy did not play a role, neither did dictatorship or oil. Then she lived to see destruction and oppression but she kept on dreaming of a renaissance.

Adma Youssef Eliyya Nassif: Syrian, Lebanese, Christian, Muslim, Shia'a, a member of the SSNP said no to her party when it failed to meet her expectations and no to confessional institutions, and yes to Jesus and Mohammad, in her own way.

From Miqlless, the Eastern mountain of Wadi Al Hosn in Latikiyyah, to Hermel in the Beqa'a valley, there is a distance of hours but perhaps hundreds of light years that Adma crossed to find her lifetime partner and stand by him. Political parties, Arab regimes and tribes and new generations would do well to learn from Adma's experience, who, for a free Palestine and a united region, crossed all traditional boundaries.

Jawad N. Adra