

The Tent Part 4

The “history book” recounts that Druze-Maronite conflicts in 1860 broke out due to a quarrel between a Druze boy and his Maronite neighbor in the town of Beit Mery on August 30th 1859. As for the wars of the 1840s, the “history book” says that they started when a Maronite resident from Deir al-Qamar shot down a bird, a pigeon or a chicken in a field that belonged to the Nakad Family, on September 14th 1841. Several other stories also tell us on personal quarrels that developed into bloody wars.

Yes, we are taught to believe that rival zu’ama, whose grandsons contributed to this “history book”, are the ones who sought reconciliation, among ignorant people who fought for the simplest things.

This is how political and religious zu’ama deny and perpetuate their crimes.

Today, we visit the Maronite Tent. In an attempt to understand the wars of 1840s and 1860s, it is important to go back to the “Zumma System” (payment of taxes by Christians under the Shari’a law), which is not our subject today. Nonetheless, the main reason behind the conflicts between Druze and Maronites was undoubtedly foreign interference.

Maronite leaders supported the campaign of Mohammed Ali, fought with him and attacked the Druze fiercely in Mount Lebanon and Jabal al-Druze. The Patriarch at that time was supporting France, which was backing Egypt; on the other hand, England was backing the Druze, of course. Colonel Churchill said that, at the beginning of the 1840s, France paid to Patriarch Hobeish 20,000 Liras ⁽¹⁾ and encouraged him to buy weapons to fight the Druze. Colonel Rose, for his part, wrote that the Maronite Order and Bkirki were ready to launch a civil war in order to control the Mountain.

Once again, in 1860, France and England were in deep conflict and Al-Khazen Family had connections with England, and with the Ottomans through England. Patriarch Boulos Masa’ad despised them (perhaps because he was a peasant and they were aristocrats); “the Maronites thought that they were stronger than they actually are,” as Churchill says.

Haven’t the Maronite leaders learned any lessons from this?

Of course not! “France is our compassionate mother! Be proud Oh Lebanese!”

The Maronites have never been proud like the day when Gouraud declared Greater Lebanon in 1920.

At the time, they had three options: Mount Lebanon to maintain its geographical borders; the cities of Trablous, Saida and Sour, in addition to the four Qada’a, to be connected to it; Mount Lebanon to be attached to the Faysal’s Arab State, which had Damascus as capital.

We were told that Patriarch Houwayek chose the second option. Maronite zu’ama witnessed their golden age, and maintained their internal conflicts and foreign connections.

In the 1930s, under the patronage of Patriarch Arida and Bishop Mubarak and with the support of Maronite rival political forces, negotiations and agreements were made with the Jewish Agency to build a Christian State in Lebanon in parallel with the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine ⁽²⁾.

Born in Bsharreh, Patriarch Arida was not able to mend ties with the Christians of Zgharta.

Demonstrators in the North shouted:

“Patriarch Arida left us

Abdel-Hamid Karameh is our Patriarch!”

As for Emile Eddeh and Bechara al-Khoury, the former remained obedient to France and the latter to England.

Patriarch Me’ouchi, for his part, distinguished himself from his predecessors by attempting to strengthen ties with the Arabs, perhaps

due to his disagreements with Camille Chamoun; and this is why demonstrators shouted:

“Crowds from the Mountain and the Coast

Want a Patriarch in Bkirki, not a Hajj!”

In 1975, Camille Chamoun and Pierre al-Gemayel told Raymond Eddeh that it was high time to build a Christian nation and this time “a neighboring country is with us.” When he asked them which country they were talking about, they told him, “Israel”.

Camille Chamoun, unlike other zu’ama, was very blunt when he met with Begin in the latter’s house in Jerusalem. He told him privately: “Forget the West Bank and Gaza; don’t make the same mistake we did.” He reminded him that the state of Greater Lebanon should not have encompassed North and South Lebanon and the Beqa’a. He went on to say that it wasn’t the Lebanese people’s choice. “The French forced us to add these areas,” he said. This was in 1978. ⁽³⁾

Perhaps facts told by Paul Indari, in his books “Hathih Shahadati” (This is my testimony) and “Al-Jabal...Haqiqa la Tarham” (The Mountain...An unmerciful truth) ⁽⁴⁾ reflect the foreign role (in this case the Israeli role) in the country. Indari says that an Israeli officer once told a representative of the Lebanese Forces: “We will withdraw (from the Chouf) and you (Maronites and Druze) can kill each other.” Indari also presents a list of 117 Lebanese Forces militants who were killed in battles, the majority of whom died on September 4th and 5th 1983. He continues:

“No cross will be raised without a sword

And no sword will win without the cross!”

Let us contemplate these honest feelings of sufferings on one hand, and this alarming tendency for violence on the other.

Speaking of civil war, let us read what Regina Sneifer says in her book, “I laid down the arms” ⁽⁵⁾, when she went to visit Patriarch Sfeir in 1986:

“In a trembling voice, I tell him about those missing, the bodies balanced with weights in the sea. No words can be read on the face of Patriarch.

I continue my story, but I feel that my words perish in this cold scenery. A long silence follows ... before I understand that it is my time to leave.”

Indari quotes Charles Malek (his spiritual guide) as saying in Mar Moussa Monastery in al-Douar in July 1981: “I am perfectly sure of what historians in the universities of Freiburg...Oxford...and Harvard will write in 2030 about the civil war in Lebanon. They will say that war was mainly over the fate of free Christianity in Lebanon. Do we, free Christians, have a future in Lebanon?”

Yes, we all have a future, when we become secular citizens who believe in true democracy and do not fight over a chicken or a parliamentary ministerial seat, hold a mass for France and name our streets after those who occupied Lebanon, starting with Gouraud, Foch and Clemenceau.

The fact remains that the Maronite zu’ama and clergy had a golden opportunity to build a state, but instead, they opted for pettiness.

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⁽¹⁾ *Affairs of Syria, London, Printed by Harrison and Sons*

At that time, the daily wage of a farmer was 1.2 piaster, which means that 20,000 Liras is equivalent to millions of dollars nowadays.

⁽²⁾ *Laura Zitrain Eisenberg, “My Enemy’s Enemy”, translated by Fadi Hammoud, Arabic Edition First Published in 1997*

⁽³⁾ *David Kinche, “The Last Option”, 1991*

⁽⁴⁾ *Paul Indari, former military official in the Lebanese Forces; he wrote “Hathih Shahadati” (2006) and “Al-Jabal: Haqiqa la Tarham” (1999)*

⁽⁵⁾ *Regina Sneifer, “J’ai déposé les armes”, Paris 2006*

