

Ezzedine KALAK (1936-1978)

Born in Haifa, Palestine, in 1936, his father gave him his name after the name of sheikh Ezzedine Al-Kassam, the leader of the Palestinian uprising against the British occupation of Palestine in which Ezzedine father was a fighter.

In 1948, due to the consternation of the Zionist bands, the family of Izzedeen – child at that time – were driven out of their home to take refuge in Damascus, where they are still living and where Ezzedine.

The young Ezzedine received his primary and secondary education in Damascus, respectively, Ibn Khaldoun primary school, then Al-Maydan secondary school. He joined Damascus University from which he got his BSc degree in Math, Physics and Chemistry in 1963.

Since childhood, Ezzedine loved arts; music, painting, writing and acting. While at Secondary school, he performed on the school stage and took part in radio-broadcast plays.

At twenty, he wrote short stories and became a member of The "Pen Revelation League". His stories appeared in a number of Syrian journals such as "The Critics", "The Public Opinion", and the "Vanguard". His first story collection "Martyrs Without Monuments", was published after his death. For him these stories were sort of "shakeup of the Palestinian revolution elements and of the Arab consciousness, eight years after the Palestinian calamity and the exodus from Palestine".

Ezzedine intellectual maturity, together with an early political awareness and an inclination towards progressive and democratic thoughts, cost him three years in prison (1959-1961).

Directly after graduating from Damascus University, Ezzedine worked as a teacher of Chemistry and Physics in Saudi Arabia for two years.

His ambitions were beyond being a teacher. In 1965, he left for France and directly started learning French. He then joined Tours & Poitier

University for a higher degree in chemistry. In 1969, he got his doctorate in chemistry and physics.

His academic career, however, did not hold him back from speaking out about the Palestinian calamity.

He continued explaining his national case to all the French people he could meet at that time. He subsequently started to hold debating groups in different French cities, a thing that caught the attention of the Zionist elements in France and considered him a dangerous Palestinian enemy. Many attempts were made against his life, even before he became the PLO representative in France.

In 1969, Ezzedine left Poitiers for Paris where he was elected the head of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) in France. As thus, he cooperated with *Mahmoud Al-Hamshari*, the FATEH Representative in France to sustain the struggle in France which was, at that time, the most prominent European country embracing the Zionist Movement.

With strong support from the Palestinian students and workers in France, Ezzedine was elected as the first PLO representative in France, after the assassination of *Mahmoud Al-Hamshari*, the PLO chief in France.

Ezzedine started his diplomatic appointment in May 1973, a period of a difficult political atmosphere. He began by contacting high-level political personalities trying to win their support and build some sort of friendship with them. He also made contacts with the progressive and democratic forces in Europe.

Thanks to his distinguished personality, and his excellent French and English, he could address the French minds and hearts and was called "The Palestinian TV man", a credit that was gained despite the widespread support of Zionism in France.

To gain a wider support, he tried to attend all international conferences he could: mainly that of "The International Conference of Parliaments" in Madrid where he managed to meet and speak to the Spanish King "Johuan Carlos" in his capacity as PLO representative in France".

Following his audience with the Spanish king, a PLO office in Madrid was approved.

The French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing also gave his Ok for a PLO liaison and information office in Paris.

Later, Ezzedine was officially invited, as the head of the PLO office in Paris, to attend the ceremony held at the Elysee Palace in honor of King Khaled of Saudi Arabia early 1978. Ezzedine was the first PLO official to enter the said Palace by an official invitation.

Though flooded in his office responsibilities and the long continuous working hours, and unsettled in a house of his own, Ezzedine remained ambitious to continue his higher education. He enrolled in the Ph.D. degree program at the Higher School of Applied Sciences in Paris.

In addition to all his official activities he worked hard to bring to light the Palestinian heritage and the civilized culture of the suppressed Palestinian people, which the Zionist had tried to sabotage.

He made use of his little free time to collect the postcards that had been used in Palestine since the early 19th century which carried names of Palestinian people and places. Some of those cards were shown later in the book; "Palestine Post cards from The collection of Ezzedine KALAK"

Ezzedine also left a great collection of Palestinian posters some of which he himself designed shortly before his death. These were published by Sicomere publishing house in Paris under the title "Palestinian Posters: The collection of Ezzedine KALAK".

It is also worth mentioning that Ezzedine founded at the PLO office in Paris a special division for the Palestinian cinema. He was interested in the field due to his belief that the cinema was an effective element in serving the Palestinian cause. The cinema French journal "**Cahier**" described Ezzedine (in September 1978) as having much intelligence and great talent that helped him attract a group of progressive French people. Cinematographers (Vincennes Group) produced a documentary film about his death called it "Martyr Ezzedine KALAK collection".

In addition Ezzedine worked with Monte Carlo Broadcasting Service only for a short time as news producer and translator.

Ezzedine was assassinated on August 3rd, 1978 by an agent working against the Palestinian cause. The PLO accused the Iraqi intelligence service to be behind the crime though the criminals were Palestinian mercenaries belonging to Abu Nidal group who were also penetrated by the Israeli Mossad. A piece of information revealed, by one of the criminals group who later defected from Abu Nidal group.

In addition to being a loss to the Palestinian cause, Ezzedine death was also a great loss to the Progressive and liberty-fighters group. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official statement condemning the crime against "one who was always working for constructive dialogue with the French authorities". Most French journals praised Ezzedine purity, liveliness and intelligence all of which were dedicated for the service of his cause. As an artist he always refused to carry arms although he was always under threat as a chemistry scientist.

As a progressive person he was an advocate of women's cause. He believed in the positive social results of women's role in the Palestinian struggle. As such he supported a female to become the head of the Palestinian Student Union in France. That Lady "leila shahid" became the first Palestinian Ambassador to France and the EU.

A great number of people participated in the prayer for Ezzedine soul at Paris Mosque including Arab diplomats in Paris.

Also a great number of French people who knew Ezzedine took part in the funeral. Among them were artists and comrades who had been associated with him in patriotic activities in France.

The body was then flown to Damascus (Syria), and was buried in Yermouk Martyres Graveyard. At the funeral, there were tens of thousands of Palestinians and other Arab national from many Arab countries.

Yasser Arafat, the PLO chief, who presided over the procession, delivered a funeral oration to the martyr. Dr. LARIVIÈRE, the head of the

French-Palestinian Medical Society was also present in the final ceremony.