



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

2017



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Walid Nabhan – Malta

L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji (2013)

Exodus of Storks

Publishing House **Midsea Books Ltd**

Biography

Walid Nabhan was born in Amman, Jordan, in 1966. His family fled Al-Qbeybeh, a small village in the outskirts of Hebron, Palestine, after the 1948 war that established the state of Israel and resulted in the first Palestinian Diaspora.

Nabhan studied at United Nations schools in Amman. He arrived in Malta in 1990, where he studied laboratory technology. In 1998, he graduated in Biomedical Sciences from Bristol University in England. In 2003, he gained a master's degree in Human Rights and Democratisation from the University of Malta. He has published two collections of short stories in Maltese (*Lura d-Dar u Ġrajjet Oħra li ma Ġrawx* in 2009 and *Leĥen tal-Fuħħar u Stejjer Oħra* in 2011) and one novel (*L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji* in 2013) which won the National Prize for Literature in 2014. He also published his first collection of poetry, *Fi Triqti Lejha*, in 2014. His poetry and articles have appeared in several papers and periodicals. He has also translated contemporary literary works from Maltese into Arabic.

Synopsis

The novel tells the story, in the first person, of a Palestinian man called Nabil who has lived all his life outside his homeland. His life is irrevocably intertwined with the fate of Palestine and of the whole Arab world, and in trying to understand himself he needs to find explanations for the way things have turned out in the Middle East, especially since the Six-Day War, an event which coincided with the birth of the narrator. The events in the novel take place mainly in Jordan, where Nabil was brought up and where his father continued to live until his death, and Malta, where the protagonist ended up later in life. It is a novel about identity, exile and displacement, but also about love and family in difficult times.

L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji

Walid Nabhan

Wara li spiċċat il-gwerra tas-67 u l-ġisem Gharbi nxtehet ferut mal-art, in-nies bkew sakemm kienu ha jaghmew. Ftit minnhom, wara li raw il-kobor tal-ġisem kollu ġrieħi u ċ-ċokon tal-avversarju li mlieh bid-daqqiet, għażlu li jieqfu jemmnu f'Alla. Oħrajn qalu li n-nuqqas t'Alla huwa li wassalna għal dan, u li l-Iżlam huwa l-unika kura biex tfejjaq. L-oħrajn saħqu li l-komuniżmu huwa l-mediċina fejjieqa, u n-Nazzjonalisti Gharab ma kinux jafu x'se jaqbd u jagħmlu minħabba li l-proġett romantiku tagħhom kien mixħut mal-art u qiegħed jitlef ħafna dmija, u milli jidher ma kienx hemm demm mit-tip tiegħu. Tilwim u għajjat, u mitt elf sikkina biex joperaw fuq il-ġisem stendut. Iktar ħabsijiet u iktar arresti u sparar bejn l-avversarji politiċi u fuq iċ-ċittadini, filwaqt li l-ġisem midrub mimdud mal-art diehel f'koma dejjiema.

Fost dan kollu, fl-ewwel anniversarju tat-twelid tiegħi u t'oħti t-tewmija, ommi waqfet titkellem. Kienet ilha li naqqset mill-paroli imma issa waqfet għalkollox. Ikellmuha u ma twegibx lura, qisha truxa ma tisma' xejn. Għoxrin sena ilu waqfu jleqqu għajnejha u issa waqfu jitharrku xofftejha. Żammet il-kliem u n-niket u l-ħasra u r-rabja u l-konfużjoni kollha ġo fiha u sakkrithom wara bibien is-silenzju ħoxnin. Missieri qatt ma insista li jehodha għall-kura xi mkien, donnu kien jaf li ma kienx hemm kura għaliha. Baqa' jiċċassa bħas-soltu, qisu ma ġralha xejn. Il-ftit ħin li kien iqatta' d-dar kien iqattgħu jħares fil-mhux magħruf tiegħu. Kultant kien iħares naqra lejha u malajr ineħħi ħarstu mikduda minn fuqha, donnu kien jaf x'kien qed jistennieha wara l-intrata tas-skiet.

Fl-14 ta' Lulju 1969, sentejn wara d-9 ta' Ġunju u s-silenzju ta' omni, eżatt fis-sagħtejn ta' filgħodu, omni mietet fl-età ta' 44 sena. Il-mara li qalu li xi darba kienet gustuża, u li hadd ma jiftakar meta kienet l-aħħar darba li rawha titbissem, qabdet u mietet imlefilfa fi skietha. Jiena u n-Nakseh konna għadna kif ninfatmu minn sidirha.

Għall-bidu, it-tobba tal-UNRWA, l-aġenzija tal-Ġnus taparsi Magħquda mwaqqfa għall-għajnuna tar-Refuġjati Palestinjani fix-xerq Qrib, ikkonkludew mit-testijiet li għamlu fuq omni li filwaqt li jiena kont nerda' mill-ftit ħalib fqir li baqgħalha fi driegħha, oħti t-tewmija kienet qed tinjettalha xi velenu rari li jagħmel ħsara kbira fis-sider.

L-attenzjoni tat-tobba Skandinavi tal-UNRWA bdiet tikber malajr meta bdew jinnotaw li qegħdin imutu ħafna nies fil-kampijiet tar-refuġjati mingħajr ma kien hemm fuqhom sinjali ta' mard kroniku, u l-maġġoranza tagħhom qed jieqfu jtkellmu f'salt wara li jibbiesu xofftejh. It-tobba Skandinavi u Belġjani tathom rashom u kienu ħa jiġġennu, għax meta ttestjaw lin-nies ħajjin u mejtin sabulhom traċċi mill-istess velenu t'oħti t-tewmija. It-tobba baġtu għall-iktar apparat avvanzat iżda għalxejn. Ħafna bijopsiji u ħafna strumenti u kampjuni u mikroskopji u professuri ġejjin u sejrini u hadd ma rnexxielu jstabbilixxi r-rabta bejn il-velenu t'oħti t-tewmija u l-ħemda ta' xofftejn ir-refuġjati Palestinjani li nfixxu mal-erbat irkejjen tas-Sirja u l-Libanu u l-Ġordan. Intefqu flus kbar iżda l-misteru baqa' għaddej ġmielu, sakemm ġew żewġ studenti Norveġiżi li kienu qed jagħmlu xi studju fl-antropoloġija u wara ftit stħarriġ u ftit żjarat fid-djar taż-żingu, ikkonkludew li dawn in-nies li qed taqbadhom is-sikta u jmutu wara sena jew sentejn, tlieta l-iżjed, kellhom xi ħaġa kumuni bejniethom, xi ħaġa li l-ebda professur, l-ebda pillola, l-ebda magna, l-ebda strument, l-ebda apparat ma jista' jfejjaqha.

Wara r-rabta sentimentali, issa nqatgħet ir-rabta metabolika ma' ommi. Ommi telqet fl-iktar mumentu li kelli bżonnha, u biex tkompli titnejjek bija d-dinja, għoxrin sena wara, wara li blajt nofs il-pjaneta, ħarġuli ħafna nisa li riedu jagħmluha ta' ommi. Kif tista' tifhem mara? Jitla' ormon u jagħmilha skjava tiegħu. Jitla' ormon u jtella' miegħu elf haġa li trid tiegħu ħsieb elf haġa. Anke jekk din il-ħaġa tkun sfigurata u tobrox u tniggeż u ġabet magħha saħta kbira fid-dinja. Jitla' ormon u jġib miegħu proċess ta' trasformazzjoni misterjuża. Il-pali tal-idejn isiru għodda tat-tmellis, is-saqajn imħaded u s-sider fliexken ta' ħalib diefi sustanzjuż, u n-nippa gaża ratba tassorbi l-uġiġħ u l-ġuħ u d-dwejjaq u l-biki.

Fl-14 ta' Lulju 1969 tlift lil ommi li qatt ma kelli. Tlift lil ommi li kien ilha mejta mill-1948. Iz-zija Safija, oħtha, saħqet li mhux veru ommi kienet ilha mejta mill-1948 għax skont hi, ommi baqgħet tittama sal-1967. "Min jittama ma jkunx mejjet ħanini," qalet iz-zija. Id-differenza bejn bniedem ħaj u iehor mejjet, skont iz-zija Safija, hi li wieħed jittama u l-iehor le, voldieri ommi mietet mal-wasla t'oħti t-tewmija. Għalhekk abbli missieri mindu twelidt qatt ma ġie jittawwali biex jara x'forma għandu wiċċi li 'l quddiem nett ħa jsir kopja perfetta tiegħu. Bilfors beda jassoċjani mat-telfa tal-Palestina li wasslet għat-telfa tal-mara tiegħu li raha tmūt quddiem għajnejh mingħajr ma seta' jagħmlilha xejn, baqa' jsegwiha fis-skiet sakemm ippakkjat u telqet mid-dinja bi kwietha.

Ommi ndifnet xi tmintax-il metru 'l bogħod minn oħtha Sarah li kienet mietet tlettax-il ġurnata qabilha. Bejniethom, fl-istess ringiela, kien hemm seba' oqbra ġodda, tlieta mir-residenti tagħhom jiġu minni u aktarx il-kawża tal-mewt tagħhom kellha x'taqsam mal-qerda li ġibt miegħi fid-dinja. Mhux ta' b'xejn bqajt għal żmien twil inhossni responsabbli għal dawk il-ħofor li dejjem jespandu.

Omm il-Ħiran, iċ-ċimiterju iżolat fix-Xlokk t'Amman, fl-1967 kien għadu żgħir u kważi vojti. Sal-1970 gie ddikjarat mimli u ma jiflaħx kadavru mgiddem ieħor, u l-gvern Ħaximita mhux elett kellu jalloka post ieħor biex jibda jservi bhala ċimiterju ġdid għar-residenti t'Amman. Ir-residenti gergru kemm felħu minħabba li l-post il-ġdid li alloka l-gvern mhux elett kien 'il barra sew minn Amman u li ħa jibda jkollhom ġibda sakemm jaslu s'hemm biex jidfnu l-mejtin tagħhom jew iżuru 'l qrabathom. Barra minn hekk, il-mejtin Ġordanizi proprji tal-post ma tantx ħadu gost bil-preżenza tar-refuġjati mixħutin ħdejhom b'saqajhom jintnu pesta. Min jaf meta kienu nhaslu l-aħħar? Iktar u iktar jekk inhaslu b'dak is-sapun tal-Ġnus taparsi Magħquda magħmul miż-żejt tal-qali użati.

L-ewwel ħadnieħom l-ispazju ta' fuq l-art u issa qegħdin indejquhom anke fil-ġuf tagħha. Il-gvern mhux elett intebaħ li jekk jilqa' t-talba tagħhom ħa jkollu jagħmel żewġ ċimiterji, wieħed għan-nies Ġordanizi safja u ieħor għar-refuġjati mnittnin. Wara li ħasibha sew intebaħ li dan kien ser johloq firda b'konsegwenzi koroh li ma kellux moħħhom dak iż-żmien. Il-mejtin ma kinux idejquh. Aktar il-militanti ħajjin li bdew joperaw fil-Punent tal-pajiz u jisparaw fuq l-Iżrael minn diversi postijiet. Il-gvern mhux elett Ġordaniz beda jgħid li d-dar tiegħu magħmula mill-ħġieg u li ma jistax ikun li toqgħod tissotta n-nies bil-ġebel meta d-dar tiegħek magħmula mill-ħġieg. Aħseb u ara joqgħod jispara xi ħadd barrani mingħandek. Il-gvern mhux elett Ġordaniz qatagħha li ma jistax ikun li l-Palestinjani, wara li bieġħu arthom lil-Lhud u qabdu prezzha fil-but, joqogħdu jisparaw minn ġor-renju fragli, erhilu li x-Xatt tal-Punent li jinkludi lil Ġerusalem tal-Lvant sa dak iż-żmien kien għadu taħt il-kuruna Ħaximita. Ix-Xatt tal-Punent jgħidulu hekk għax ix-Xatt tal-Lvant huwa l-Ġordan stess u ż-żewġt ixtut kienu

meqjusin bħala ż-żewġ pulmuni tal-Ġordan li r-re tiegħu skopra f'daqqa li b'pulmun wieħed aktar jaqbillu. Ir-re Hussein kien professur fl-arti tas-sopravivenza ġewwa dik il-foresta ta' azzarini.

Minkejja t-tgergir tan-nies Ġordaniżi indigeni, il-gvern mhux elett Ġordaniż xorta alloka roqgħa art kbira għaċ-ċimiterju ġdid fl-Ilbiċ ta' Amman f'post jgħidulu Saḥāb, fit-tarf tad-deżert li qed jaggregdixxi lil Amman min-Nofsinhar, fejn ḥamsa u tletin sena wara mort infittex il-qabar ta' missieri u għamilt is-siġhat indur u nagħqad mitluf, ġewwa ċimiterju li għal ftit hin stħajjiltu ikbar mill-pajjiż innifsu. Dak iċ-ċimiterju rnexxielu jwaqqaf il-passi fermi tad-deżert selvaġġ mifruq mill-Ḥiġāz u Tabūk fis-Sawdita Għarbija, minn fejn ḥareġ il-profeta Gharbi, u ḥarġu šhabu warajh, u bl-ilbiesi strambi tagħhom irrenjaw nofs id-dinja antika. Forsi rrenjaw meta kellhom ras waħda, mhux għexieren ta' rjus bla għamla jew fasla ċara, għax daqqa tarahom bi rjus ta' lpup u daqqa tarahom ta' ngħaġ, u dan l-aḥḥar qed narahom bi rjus ta' rettili mdaḥḥlin fiż-żmien. Uḥud minnhom jixbhu lil dawk il-kreaturi strambi li jidhru f'Jurassic Park.

Il-gvern qal li d-dar tiegħu magħmula mill-ḥġieġ, u li min ikollu daru tal-ḥġieġ, ma jridx jissotta lill-oḥrajn bil-ġebel għax jissottawh lura u jkissrulu kollox. U apparti l-isparar, il-gvern mhux elett kompli jgħid li l-Palestinjani bdew iqazžu 'l Alla fil-Ġordan, u li bdew jabbużaw wisq mill-ospitalità ġeneruża, u aktarx qegħdin iḥawdu t-tjubija mad-dgħufija. "Il-Palestinjani," kompli jgħid u kellu mitt elf raġun, "qegħdin isiru awtorità ġol-awtorità. Qegħdin iwaqqfu u jinterrogaw u jarrestaw lil min iridu, u anke japplikaw l-liġi mgħawġa tagħhom. Ma jistax ikun. Irridu niftakru li ḥafna minnhom mażuni u kumunisti minn dawk li jorqdu ma' ḥuthom, u b'hekk mhux talli qegħdin jirrabjaw 'l Alla biss,

izda qegħdin jirrabjaw lill-Amerikani li huma terġa' ħafna aqwa minn Alla.”

Taħt pressjoni qawwija ma tinfelaħx mill-Istati Uniti u bosta pajjiżi oħra li kien qed idejjaqhom il-mod kif kienu qegħdin iġibu ruħhom il-Palestinjani fil-Ġordan u l-mod kif qegħdin jinbxu lill-Iżrael u ma jhalluhx fi kwietu, il-gvern mhux elett Ġordaniż kellu kontra qalbu, fis-17 ta' Settembru tal-1970, jithan lir-reżistenza Palestinjana. L-armata Haξimita, li ma setgħetx tispara tir wieħed fid-direzzjoni t-tajba biex tiddifendi lil Ġerusalem fl-1967, f'daqqa waħda nbidlet fi l-juni fferoċjati ma jibzġu minn xejn. U f'inqas minn ħmistax-il ġurnata, qatlet għadd kbir ta' Palestinjani. Il-figuri finali baqgħu bħas-soltu misturin. Filwaqt li l-Palestinjani qalu li nqatlulhom 'il fuq minn ħamest elef, l-uffiċjali Ġordaniżi saħqu li n-numru ma jaqbiżx it-tliet mija. Id-differenza, bħalma qegħdin naraw, hija ċċata. Għax l-4700 ruħ xorta ħa jintesew. Il-figura eżatta, bħalma huwa magħruf, dejjem tibqa' taħt it-trab.

Id-diżgrazzja tal-1970 issemmiet Settembru l-Iswed. Għandna kollox la għandu isem deskrittiv u retoriku. Ta' tliet snin, kont diġà mgħobbi bi tliet gwerer maġġuri. In-Nakbeh u n-Nakseħ u Settembru l-Iswed. u l-kbir kien għadu ma wasalx. Tliet snin bi tliet diżgrazzji kbar u l-aħħar tnejn kif qed taraw ġibthom miegħi. Mhux ta' b'xejn li ommi għazlet li żżarma mid-dinja kmieni qabel tara lill-aħwa jbiċċru lill-aħwa u l-qraba jqattgħu fil-qraba, u l-mejtin imutu b'mistoqsijiet strambi f'għajnejhom, mistoqsijiet aktarx bla tweġiba. Li joqtluk il-għadu forsi tifhimha, izda meta joqtluk ħuk, kif tista' tifhimha?

Exodus of Storks

Walid Nabhan

Translated from Maltese by Rose Marie Caruana

When the 1967 war ended and the Arab body lay wounded on the ground, people wailed to such an extent that they almost became blind. Some people chose to stop believing in God when they gazed upon that large body full of wounds, succumbing before the feet of the small adversary that had inflicted all those injuries. Others insisted that it was disbelief in God that had landed us in this precarious situation, and that Islam was the only cure. Some retorted that communism was the answer. The Arab Nationalists had no clue what to do since their 'romantic' project had ended in a heap, bleeding to death on the ground. Shouts and quarrels broke out, while a hundred, thousand knives lashed out to operate on that supine body. Arrests and shooting as well as exchange of fire between political adversaries took place. The prisoners and 'disappeared' piled up, while the wounded body which inexorably stretched in pain was about to enter into a lasting coma.

During all these events, on the first anniversary of my birth and that of my twin sister, my mother suddenly stopped talking. She had been conversing less and less for a while but now she turned completely soundless. She didn't answer when addressed, as if she was deaf and couldn't hear anything. Twenty years ago her eyes stopped glittering with joy and now her lips became fossilised. She held all the words and grief and pity and anger and confusion within her and locked them away behind thick walls of silence. My father never insisted we take her somewhere to be cured, as if he knew that

there was no cure. He remained gazing at his nothingness, as if nothing had happened to his beloved wife. In the little time he spent at home, he kept staring into the unknown. Occasionally he would glance at her and quickly turn away frowning, as if he knew what lay in store for her and all of us, behind those silent symptoms.

At precisely two o'clock in the morning, on 14 July 1969, two years after that fateful defeat of June when my mother was engulfed in silence forever, she passed away at the age of 44. She had been described as a beautiful woman, but no one could remember the last time she had smiled after losing her Palestine. Now all of a sudden, she was gone, wrapped in eternal silence. Nakseh and I had just been weaned off her breast.

At first, after performing initial tests on my mother, the doctors at the UNRWA, the so-called 'United' Nations agency set up to aid the Palestinian refugees in the Near East, concluded that while I was suckling what was left in her dry breast, my twin sister was injecting her breast with some rare poison that caused malignancy.

The attention of the Scandinavian doctors of the UNRWA was quickly drawn to the fact that a lot of people were dying in the refugee camps without showing any outward symptoms of chronic illness, and that a large majority of people stopped talking after their lips grew stiff. The Scandinavian and Belgian doctors were at their wits' end because when they tested both the dead and the living, they found traces of that same poison which my twin sister had formulated. The doctors sent for more advanced apparatus, but it was all in vain. After performing numerous biopsies and importing numerous instruments, robots and microscopes, the

professors couldn't establish the true link between my twin sister's poison and the silence that embarked on the lips of the Palestinian refugees that had spread to all four corners of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. A large quantity of money was squandered but the mystery was never resolved until two Norwegian anthropologists conducted research that involved visiting those corrugated iron sheds. They immediately concluded that there was an organic link between going mute and passing away after a year or two, three at most. There was an essential ingredient which eluded all professors and doctors, and ridiculed their injections and recipes, and that anomaly was the love for Palestine.

After the sentimental bond with my mother had been broken, the metabolic bond was immediately severed. My mother had left when I needed her most. To add salt to the bleeding wound, the world made fun of me 20 years later by providing me with loads of 'mothers'. How could you possibly understand a woman? A hormone pops up and she promptly becomes enslaved. Another hormone appears, searching for 1,000 things that need to be cared for from a woman's biological perspective. Even if this thing is disfigured and prickly and has caused a dreadful curse upon the whole world. Then another hormone enters the bloodstream and sends her into a mysterious transformation. Hands abruptly become tools to caress. Legs transform into pillows. Breasts into nozzles of nourishing protein withstanding tears and pain while providing its unconditional comfort and softness.

On 14 July 1969, I lost the mother I never had. The mother who had been dead since 1948. Her sister, my aunt Safiyyah, insisted that it wasn't true that my mother had died in 1948 because, according to her, my mother kept up her hopes until 1967. "Who hopes isn't dead, my dear," my aunt said. According to her, the

difference between a dead person and a living one, is that one hopes or not. This meant that my mother died when my twin sister was born. Perhaps that's why my father never bothered to look at me from the day I was born, was never interested to look at my face which one day would be a perfect copy of his. No doubt he associated me with the loss of Palestine, which in turn caused my mother's death. He watched her slipping away before his very eyes, wrapped up in his own silence, but was unable to do anything. He helplessly observed her packing her suitcases to leave this earth without fuss.

My mother was buried about 18 metres away from her sister Sarah who had died 13 days before. In the same row, there were seven new tombs between them. Three of their residents were my relatives. Most probably, their demise was due to the destruction I had brought with me into the world. It's no wonder I spent many long years feeling guilty and responsible for those holes in the ground that continuously multiplied.

Omm il-Hiran, the isolated cemetery in the south east of Amman, was a small and nearly empty cemetery in 1967. By 1970 it was declared full to bursting point, unable to accommodate another blasted grave. The non-elected Hashemite government had to allocate another place to serve as the new cemetery for Amman's inhabitants. The Jordanians grumbled vociferously since the new cemetery was far away and would require an inconveniently long journey to bury one's dead or to visit their graves. Besides this, the native Jordanian cadavers weren't too pleased to reside beside the dead refugees. Goodness knows the last time they washed themselves before dying! It would have been even worse if they had washed themselves with that soap made out of used frying oil which the so-called United Nations provided!

First we occupied their space above the ground and now we're bothering them in their tombs too. The non-elected government of Jordan quickly realised that if it were to give in to the native residents' demands, it would have to set up two cemeteries, one for the native Jordanians and another for the stinky refugees. But after thinking it through, the non-elected government concluded that a decision like that would create a rift with unimaginably terrifying consequences. After all, from the non-elected government's perspective, the dead wouldn't give a shit! It was more concerned about the living militants who began to operate in the western part of the country, firing at Israel from various angles. The non-elected Jordanian cabinet said that their house was made of glass and therefore they couldn't afford to throw stones at the houses of others, because the others would throw stones back and destroy theirs. So the non-elected Jordanian government banned the Palestinians, who had *sold* their homeland to the Jews, from attacking Israel from their fragile kingdom of Jordan. Never mind that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was under the Hashemite Crown. The West Bank is called the West Bank, because the East Bank is in fact, Jordan. The two banks were considered to be the two lungs of Jordan. Though all of a sudden the Hashemite King realised that it was better off with one lung. King Hussein was a true professor of the art of survival amongst that forest of rifles.

In spite of the indigenous Jordanians' complaints, the government went ahead with allocating a large patch of ground to serve as a new cemetery in the south west of Amman, at a place called *Sahab*, which lies at the edge of the desert that stabs Amman from the south. Thirty-five years later, I returned to look for my father's grave and spent hours there, completely lost and unable to find my bearings in a cemetery

that appeared larger than the country itself. That cemetery halted the march of the wild desert; a desert spreading from Hejaz and Tabuk in Saudi Arabia, where the Arab prophet and his strange companions emerged from, to rule half of the ancient world.

Moreover, the non-elected government also stated that the Palestinians were badly behaved in Jordan, abusing their hosts' hospitality and, in all probability, confusing kindness for weakness. The Palestinians were establishing an authority within the authority. They stopped, interrogated and arrested whoever they pleased and brought them in front of their own distorted justice. We must remember that many of these Palestinians are Freemasons and communists who sleep with their sisters, and therefore are not only displeasing God but are also angering the Americans who are even more powerful than God.

Under this unbearable pressure, mainly from the United States and other countries that disliked the way Palestinians were behaving in Jordan, the non-elected Jordanian government had no choice but to crush the Palestinian resistance on 17 September 1970. The Hashemite army, which couldn't fire a single shot in the right direction to defend Jerusalem in 1967, suddenly transformed into a ferocious lion, fearing nothing. In less than 48 hours, this army was able to massacre a respectable number of Palestinian refugees. As usual, the exact number of casualties was kept under wraps. While the Palestinians recorded over 5,000 casualties, the Jordanian officials insisted that the death toll didn't exceed 300. Evidently, there is a ridiculous gap because those 4,700 corpses must have been fabricated! The exact figure will always remain buried under the dust.

The 1970 disaster was named the Black September, a descriptive and rhetorical name. By the age of three, I was already burdened with three major wars. Nakbeh, Nakseh and Black September, and the worst was yet to come. Three years burdened by three major disasters of which the latter two, as we have noted, were brought on by me. To no surprise, my mother chose to leave this world early on, before she saw brothers killing brothers, neighbours butchering neighbours and people dying with strange questions in their eyes, questions with heavy answers. You could possibly understand an enemy killing you, but how could you come to terms with your brother killing you?



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

2017

Walid Nabhan – Malta

L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji

Exodus of Storks

260 pp, 2013

Translations: The rights for translation have not been sold yet.
(Last Update – March 2017)

Publishing House **Midsea Books Ltd**

68 Carmelites Street

Sta Venera SVR1724 – Malta

Tel. +356 21497046

Contact: admin@midseabooks.com

ISBN: 978-99932-7-470-4

EUPL / FEP-FEE – Rue Montoyer, 31 – B-1000 Brussels – T. +32 (0)2 770.11.10
info@euprizeliterature.eu – www.euprizeliterature.eu



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