



**Sedek**

A Journal on the Ongoing Nakba

**EXILE & RETURN TO MISKA**

A h m a d B a r c l a y

Towards return  
of Palestinian refugees

Issue no. 6

May 2011

“In April 2005, on the evening of the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Nakba, a group of young people, members of the Nakba’s third generation who lived in Tira, not far from their village, established the Committee of Miska’s Uprooted. They decided to document the story of their village and their ancestors’ suffering in order to defend their future.

That April initiative continued with a visit to the village by a large number of people, including dozens from the village and their supporters as well as members of Zochrot. The participants planted olive and fig saplings. A few days later the authorities uprooted the saplings and blocked the roads leading to the village school, barring its door.

The initiative continued. The committee reopened the school building and turned it into a cultural center. The first cultural evening was held on May 11, 2005. Salman Natour, the author, was the guest; he presented his play, Memory. The authorities reacted quickly. They surrounded the school building with barbed wire.

Two more cultural evenings were held in July, 2005. The guest at the first was the Iraqi-Jewish writer, Sami Michael. The second involved artistic and political activities in which dozens of artists, activists and villagers participated. The fence was turned into a huge protest display. The nervous authorities responded stupidly, tearing down the art works.

A year later, on May 3, 2006, on the 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba, Lutf Nuwaser, the actor, presented "Uncle Matta", a story of the Nakba for children, amidst the remains of the village. This time the response bordered on the insane. The regime sent bulldozers to destroy the school building, and planted orange trees to hide the criminal act. Our response was to mark on the

ground the location where the school had stood before the Nakba.

In May, 2007, we held the first commemoration of the Nakba without the school building. But we nevertheless planned a special children’s activity – drawing a huge wall mural. This time, after the regime finally understood that the destruction failed to stop us, it didn’t respond.”

Umar Ighbarieh wrote this account and published it in April, 2009, two years before this issue of Sedek was prepared, in a booklet Zochrot published for a tour of the village of Miska. During these two years, activities commemorating the village and planning for the return continued, and Miska became increasingly important as a site of commemoration and political activity. That is why three of the projects described in this issue of Sedek focus on the possibility of a return to Miska.

The project by Ahmad Barclay developed out of Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) in Beit Sahur. Ahmad’s narrative of ‘re-emergence’ imagines a return taking place in four stages: first, symbolic interventions on the site of the village; second, a token return to Miska by Palestinians living in Israel; third, an actual return by a handful of other families, who begin to recreate the urban fabric; fourth, a solidification of the urban fabric as the remaining families choose to return or to remain absent.

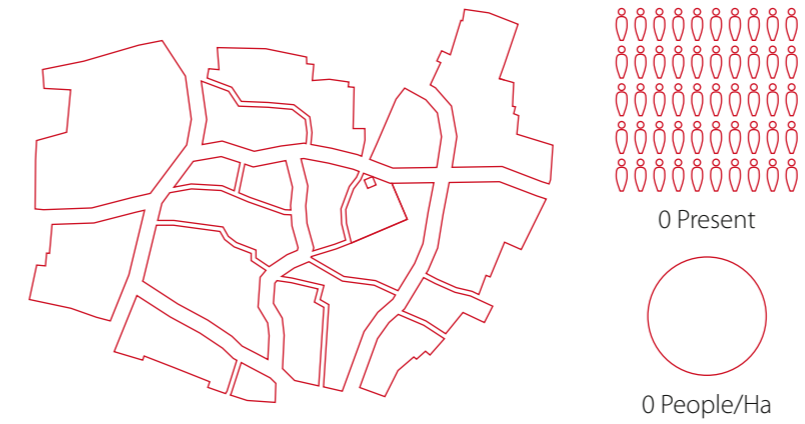
## PHASE 1

In many senses, this stage could be understood as the present situation. It is a state that allows for symbolic intervention in anticipation of a physical return, much in the manner of the recent re-inhabitation of the primary school buildings (prior to their destruction). The key principle in this stage is one of 'signposting' – laying markers to reappropriate the site of the village.



### Laying Markers

A series of symbolic spatial interventions signpost the exiled families and social fabric of the village.



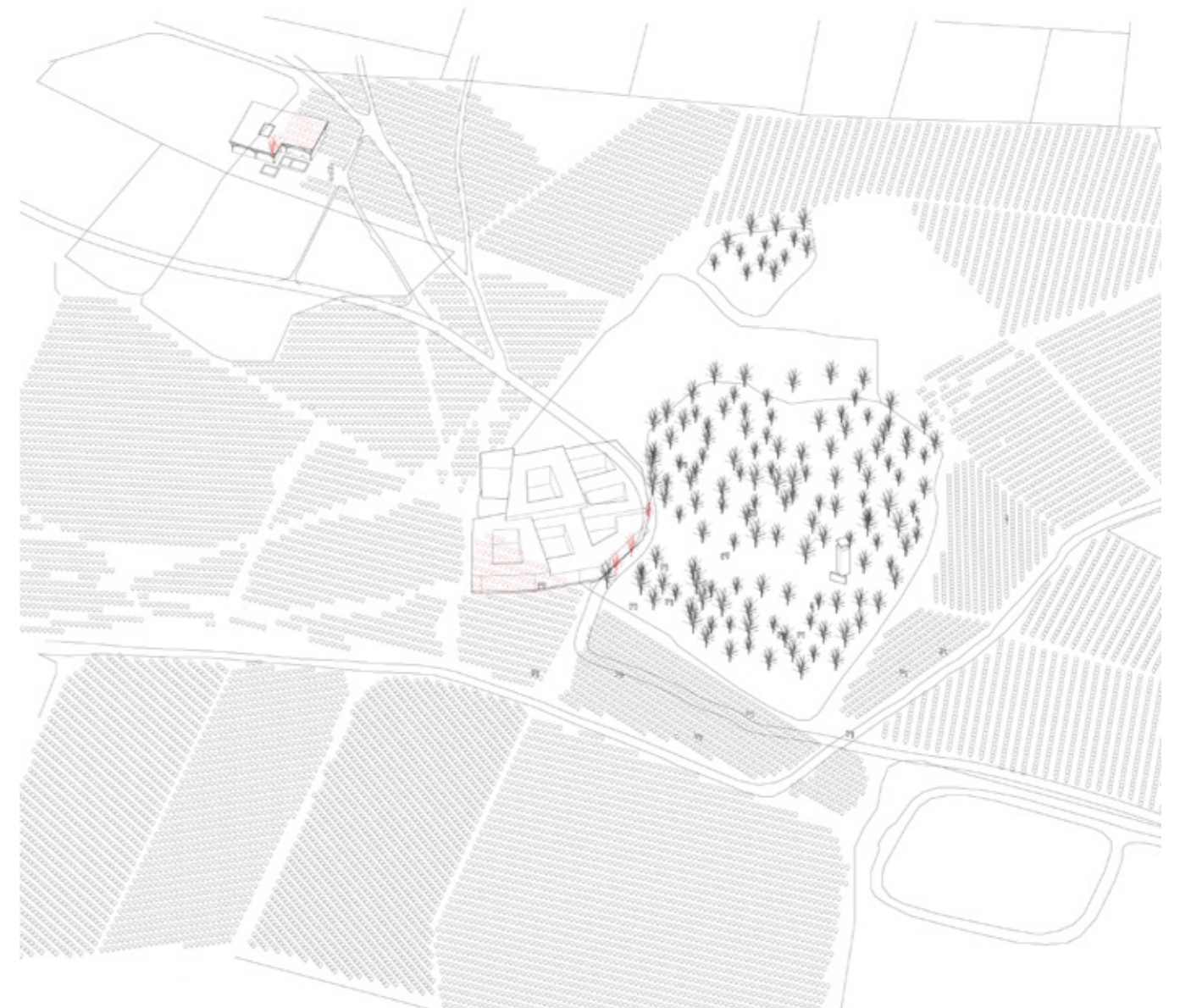
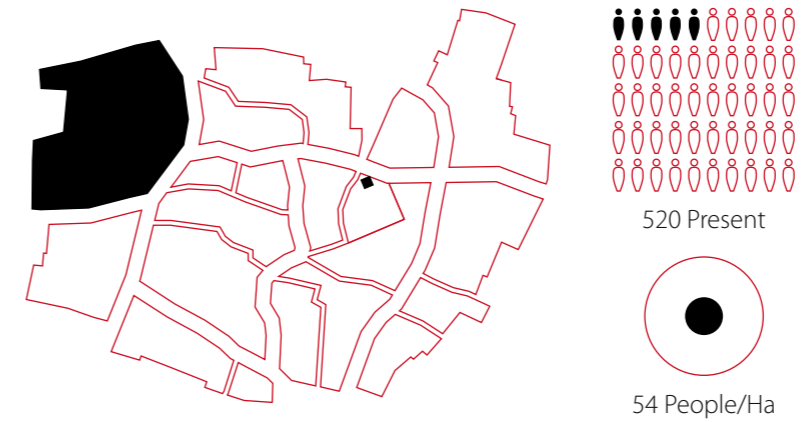
## PHASE 2

This state represents the symbolic return of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, a group who currently have a degree of physical access to the site, although they are denied land rights. All other families remain in a state of uncertainty, their plots untouched by development. If this state is read as a stage of return, it is perhaps the responsibility of this first contingent of returnees to plant the catalysts that will allow the village to grow.



### Planting Catalysts

Inauguration of the key public buildings and infrastructural devices will initiate and sustain a process of propagation. The minaret already acts as a prominent marker of continuous Palestinian presence throughout Israel-Palestine (absent only in a small number of exclusively Christian or Druze localities). The near-universal choice to bathe these minarets in green light at night appears orchestrated to communicate a symbolic message of defiance.



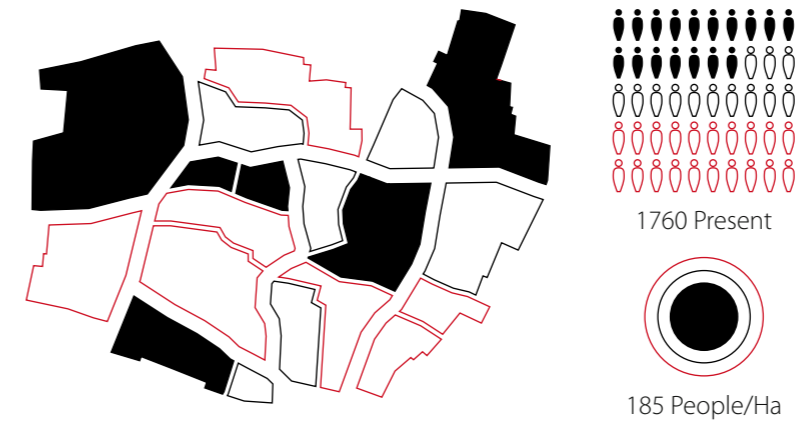
### PHASE 3

In this state, some families have been able to make a choice to return or to remain absent, whilst others remain in a state of uncertainty. At this stage, the returning villagers, their numbers having grown exponentially in exile, are likely to begin to 'densify' the original grain of the village as the original family plots start to expand vertically and consolidate into dense urban blocks.



#### Framing Uncertainty

A phased return of refugees creates an urbanism composed of 'certain' and 'uncertain' space. A densified architecture of presence juxtaposed with the landscape of erasure continues to mark the families whose futures are undecided or who are still unable to return.



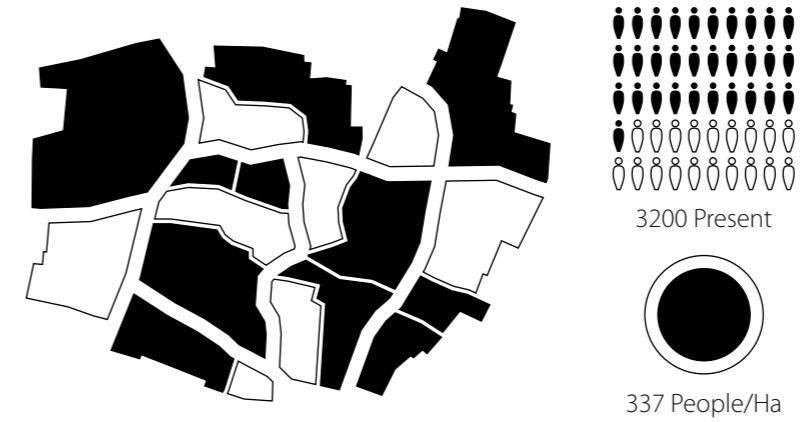
## PHASE 4

In this state every exiled family has made its choice to return or remain absent. The voids of absence become protected communal spaces within the fabric of the village. It is suggested that these spaces might be reappropriated through a process of 'unearthing'. Importantly, this state should be seen only as the culmination of the first stage of a return: the transition from 'uncertainty' to 'certainty' as a means of beginning to reconcile the condition of 'exile' through the construction of a lived space that reconnects past and present. The next stage might be seen as one of 're-integration.' Expansion of the urban realm of the village would be likely to follow, as well as outward-looking development such as increased integration with regional and national infrastructure.



### Marking Absence

The potential choice of some families to remain in absence introduces permanent voids within the urban fabric. These become public spaces with an architecture composed of a dialogue between the layers of memory, erasure and presence.





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