Akel House – Deir Yassin

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky Text Haim Hanegbi

In his home in the Old City of Jerusalem, a two minute walk from Herod's Gate, Muhammad Radwan Akel lives with the memories of his childhood home in the village of Deir Yassin, as if past and present were intertwined.

He places the trucks in a line on the table, one next to the other, and smiles. He takes one of them, presses a small switch on its side and places it on the floor. And the truck, like a truck, silver letters reading IMPERIAL engraved on its sides, drives straight at the nearby wall and gets stuck. None of the guests says a word, or asks what the game might mean. And he, the owner of the strange fleet of trucks, looks at his guests as if he were joking, and a long moment passes before he solves for them the riddle of his "reds" .

The Deir Yassin massacre, 9 April 1948 – the most widely known of all the massacres that occurred that year – caught Muhammad Radwan when he was 20 years old, but thanks to God's mercy, he says, I escaped alive from that hell. The fear of death was everywhere in the village that day, which Radwan remembers. Exploding bombs and the sound of gunfire filled the air, and from time to time, when they briefly subsided, cries for help and wailing could be heard everywhere. Some people closed themselves up in their homes, and some burst outside without giving it a second thought. All of them were among those slaughtered.

Muhammad Radwan, called Abu Mahmud, suddenly stopped the tale of slaughter, and didn't return to it for the rest of the day. It seems that he, like other survivors of Deir Yassin, decided at some point, many years ago,

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not to revisit willingly the details of what had happened. In any event, the story was publicized throughout the world and became a symbol of the Palestinian disaster. Now, devoting his attention to his guests, the smile returned to his lips, as if life had always been good to him.

He returned to his youth, to tell of the good times he had seen. He was from one of the Deir Yassin families that had run successful businesses quarrying stone. They'd dig the stone from their land and chisel it. Then they'd load it onto red trucks, manufactured in the United States, made by IMPERIAL, and deliver it to customers. Those trucks, four in number, were proof that the Radwans were successful.

I eventually turned the memories of the red trucks into toys, says Abu Mahmud, for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren to enjoy. I built exact replicas of the trucks out of wood, from memory, with small rubber wheels and steering wheels the size of a coin, and I painted them red. After that I asked my sons to help, and they installed in each of these model trucks a small electric motor, and the children were very happy.

Deir Yassin's stone was renowned far and wide. Villages near Jerusalem bought it, and so did neighborhoods inside the city. There was a construction boom in the country, and demand spread. Arabs and Jews, military and civil authorities of the British administration, all were starving for stone, and the people of Deir Yassin worked to satisfy their needs.

My head is likely to split open from so many memories, says Abu Mahmud, holding his temples and laughing, I try to forget and am unable to. He remembers Jews who lived in the nearby neighborhood of Giv'at Sha'ul, he remembers Jewish bus drivers from the "Mekasher" company, he remembers Jewish administrative personnel from the "Solel Boneh" construction company, he even remembers the Jewish barber from the adjoining neighborhood of Beit HaKerem. Names, addresses and even family ties. Everything. He remembers soccer competitions, "football," he calls it, between youths from Deir Yassin and those from Giv'at Sha'ul, on an improvised pitch located between the Arab village and the Jewish neighborhood, now a noisy commercial center.

The residents of Deir Yassin were forced to become refugees in the blink of an eye. Only a few hours after the massacre many survivors were loaded onto Jewish trucks – I think, says Abu Mahmud, the trucks belonged to the Haganah – that brought them to Jaffa Gate. We left everything behind in the houses, he says, furniture, bedclothes, household goods, and even money and jewelry, but my mother, may heaven have mercy on her, didn't forget to lock the doors and take the keys with her. She held onto the keys until the day she died, holding them as amulets, a promise from heaven that the day would come and we would all return home in peace.

Nineteen years passed from the time of the Nakba until the Six Day War. When the roads between east and west Jerusalem were opened, and people were allowed to go to the other side, a Jew appeared at the door of the house in the Old City, looking for someone from the Akel family, from Deir Yassin. It was Ibrahim Najar, says Abu Mahmud, an Iraqi-born Jew who lived in Giv'at Sha'ul. He was a neighbor of ours, like a brother to us, whom we called Abu Yakub. We fell into each other's arms. We grasped hands and wept, drank coffee and laughed. Later it turned out that Abu Yakub had managed somehow to save a household wheat grinder that had been ours, and kept it all these years, because he never ceased to believe that we would meet again.

The center of the village has been preserved. The stone houses slant down from the hilltop along the eastern slope, renovated and trim, between them small gardens and lawns. Who would believe that only 50 years

earlier this was a place of slaughter where more than 120 inhabitants of Deir Yassin, from infants to the elderly, were slain without having harmed anyone? The preservation and the renovation were not done to create a memorial: the location was chosen by the Israeli Ministry of Health as the site of the "Kfar Sha'ul Psychiatric Hospital," a spacious site, surrounded by a fence. The name Deir Yassin has been forgotten in Israel, and the village's location has been erased from the official maps. But Abu Mahmud remembers everything: I relive Deir Yassin, he says, like someone who never left.

Now, provided with a special permit from the hospital administration, Abu Mahmud leads his guests through the heart of the village, on paths paved by Israel with asphalt. From Cedar Street to Palm Street, on to Pine Street and Sycamore Street. There's also Peace Street. Abu Mahmud can't read the Hebrew names, but he identifies every house by its owner's name. Next to the home of Sheikh Mahmud Salah, up the hill, he pauses a while, to pray at the tomb of one who, he says, was a good and beneficent person. The sheikh, he says, was an incorruptible lawyer during the time of the English, who always fought for justice, and gained great honor as a result.

A walk of a minute or two down the hill takes us to Abu Mahmud's childhood home. One side of the house serves today as a barber shop for patients, the other side – an occupational therapy carpentry shop. Abu Mahmud conceals his excitement with a smile, unsuccessfully. I've already been here a few times, he says, and each time is like the first, I hold myself back, afraid to shame myself by crying like a child and embarrassing the people around me.

The treatment staff and the barber treat him with respect, and he, like any homeowner, inquires and questions and examines, to make sure that even in his absence the tenants take care of the elegant home, as did his forefathers. Once, he admits, during one of his earliest visits to the hospital compound, I found the house undergoing renovations and took a floor tile as a souvenir, a part of the ornamental floor that decorated the rooms, a little piece of memory, Deir Yassin in miniature.

In the yard Abu Mahmud proudly displays the ancient grape vine that, he says, his father planted in the mid-1930's. I was a young lad, he says, and I grew together with the grape vine. I saw it striving to reach the house, climbing up, until it covered the porch and shaded it. Now, now it's dying before my eyes, drying out, as if it were accusing me for abandoning it, groaning and fleeing.

Barhoum House – Malha

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky Text Haim Hanegbi

Mazuza Dib Sirhan Barhoum, a woman around 70. A fellah, the daughter of fellahs, born in the village of Malha. She descends into the valley, crosses the wadi, climbs the hill, looks around her and for an hour or two reconquers on foot the territory of her youth in the environs of west Jerusalem. There was once a Palestinian village here; now it's a Jewish neighborhood, with a soccer stadium, a large mall and a zoo. Mazuza is just like her name, in Arabic as well as in Hebrew: full of strength.

She's making a trip back to her "roots." From Ai'da, the small refugee camp touching the Israeli military base guarding Rachel's Tomb, on the outskirts of Bethlehem, to the home where she came into the world, high up in Malha. At the close of the British Mandate, 2000 villagers lived there. When Israel came into being, all, every last one became destitute refugees.

She's wearing an embroidered village dress, a white kerchief on her head. Her trip to her childhood home seems to make Mazuza stronger, physically as well as in her soul. Her face shines, her step is light. She recognizes every house and every courtyard, knows every path and every street, every curve and every overhang. Here's the house of Abd al-Fatah Darwish, she says, he was our last mukhtar. Even trees are engraved in her memory, as if she had never left.

She stops for a moment of silent prayer opposite the minaret of the mosque, painfully abandoned. That's the mosque, she says, named after Umar Ibn al-Hatib. She takes pride in naming the second caliph, who was a

trusted associate of the Prophet Muhammad, but doesn't bother explaining to those accompanying her who he was: long ago, in the seventh century, soon after the country was captured by the Islamic armies, the caliph visited Jerusalem to receive the keys to the city from the Byzantine Patriarch.

She is struck silent next to her childhood home. A two-story stone building that has survived over the years almost undamaged. The new inhabitants, the first Israelis, already moved in at the end of 1948. One of them sealed the front entrance. He enlarged the side entrance instead, that once opened onto the sheep pen, and made it the main entrance to the house.

Mazuza goes round about, looking at the house from every side. She touches the wall of the house, touches the wall around the house, as if seeking something hidden from sight. She tries to turn the handle of the side court, but it fails to respond to her jiggling and refuses to open. For the first time this morning, the indefatigable Mazuza Dib Sirhan is cloaked in sorrow. She is one woman, and also an entire nation.

The family's house, which once stood at the intersection of dusty paths, is now bordered on three sides by paved roads. Each road is a street, each street has a name. Here, in place of the Palestinians exiled from their homes, the street names read like alibis. These are the names chosen by heartless clerks and/or stupid functionaries: Struma Street, Patria Street, Exodus Street ("the exodus from Europe"). Thus, with bureaucratic arbitrariness, the sorrows of the Jews fall upon the heads of the Palestinians, as if ordained.

On the way out of the village center, back to the refugee camp, Mazuza enters one of the courtyards she recognized – the home of the Jadu family, she says – and goes over to a thick, dusty, ancient tree. I remember this tree from when I was a young girl, she mumbles, as if apologizing ahead of time for her covetousness. With a wave of her hand she picks a dusty quince, hard as a rock, wipes it off with her hand and stuffs it into her bag. A mischievous smile appears on her face. A taste of the past, she says, a gift for my elderly husband - the aroma of Malha.

Toward evening, in the living room of the small house in the Ai'da refugee camp, the memories overflow. Members of the family, refugees and children of refugees, three generations, together spin the story of the village "in the good old days." Before the disaster. What they sowed, and what they planted, what they sold and what they bought. Malha's lands stretched out from the heart of the village. Olive groves, for example, stretched to the edge of Katamon.

Again, as they've already done more times than they can count, they try to compute the total area of the village's cultivated lands, delineating from memory the paths and stone walls, re-erecting in their imagination the vegetable market near the Jaffa Gate and the cattle market near Sultan's Pool. They sing the praises of the village produce – fruit, vegetables, eggs – sold in the Mahane Yehuda market and the market in Mea Shearim. They remember the names of Jews, some who were merchants alongside them in the markets and some who were neighbors in the nearby neighborhoods of Beit HaKerem and Bayit VaGan.

They know exactly when Malha's end began. One spring morning – Saturday, 10 April 1948 – the villagers found a terrified young woman who had suddenly appeared at night in the middle of the village, as if from nowhere. Her black dress was torn, her hair disheveled, her feet bare. She carried a small child, injured. Weeping, she asked that the child be given something to drink, and his wounds bandaged. Then she told about the massacre at Deir Yassin.

The first refugees from Malha – most of them women and children – left the village on foot to Bethlehem that same Saturday evening. They feared the horror of Deir Yassin would repeat itself in the villages on the western border of Jerusalem. Everyone who remained in Malha in those days was busy harvesting and storing the crops in caves and pits, and was preparing to meet the enemy with weapons in hand.

We believed, said Mazuza, that when the fighting died down peace would return to the country and everyone would be able to go back to their villages, to their homes. We were naïve – maybe even suckers.

Kalabian House – Talbieh

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky
Text Haim Hanegbi

The Kalabian family, Palestinians of Armenian origin, left their home and all its contents behind. 1948 was a disastrous year for them. In an instant they became refugees, leaving empty-handed. Their home, which was always full of life, suddenly ceased to exist. The piano, said one of the sons many years later, was abandoned in the midst of being played, without any of us bothering to close its lid, and I keep imagining that it kept playing, on its own, a farewell melody, until we disappeared down the street and turned left toward the Old City.

The head of the family, a noted physician, built the house in 1925. Two stories, built of stone, a red tile roof. High on the façade a tile-roofed carved wooden gable, appearing to divide the house in half. The balcony railings were lacy poured concrete. The garden - laden with fruit trees and ornamental shrubbery. The wall around the garden, and the gate, were a combination of stone and iron that masons and ironworkers transformed into a decorative girdle.

In 1967, shortly after people started traveling between the two parts of Jerusalem that had been united by conquest, one of the Kalabians appeared at the gate of the house, to find it identified as 19 Disraeli Street and rented to two Jewish families. Aliza Daus, the mother of the family living on the lower floor, invited Kalabian in. "He was already about 50," she says, "excited as a child. He remembered every hallway and every corner,

touched the walls and caressed the doors. He showed me around the garden, pointed to the tree he had planted with his own hands. He asked about my family, interrogated me about what happened to the house since he left it. He said he studied pharmacy and invited us to visit his pharmacy on Salah a-Din Street, near Damascus Gate. When he rose to leave I led him to his family's large dining room, which had later been divided into two rooms by a thin plaster wall, and removed a decorated wooden box from a small cabinet sunk into a niche in the wall. I once found these things in the attic, I said to him, and handed him the box. He opened it, looked inside for a moment, and then sat down again. I saw his agitation. He pulled photographs from the box, one after the other, shuffled through them, pulled out more, suddenly viewing dozens of old family pictures. Here, he said to me, is the family's lost treasure; the album that ceased to exist at the time of the disaster has now been returned to its owner."

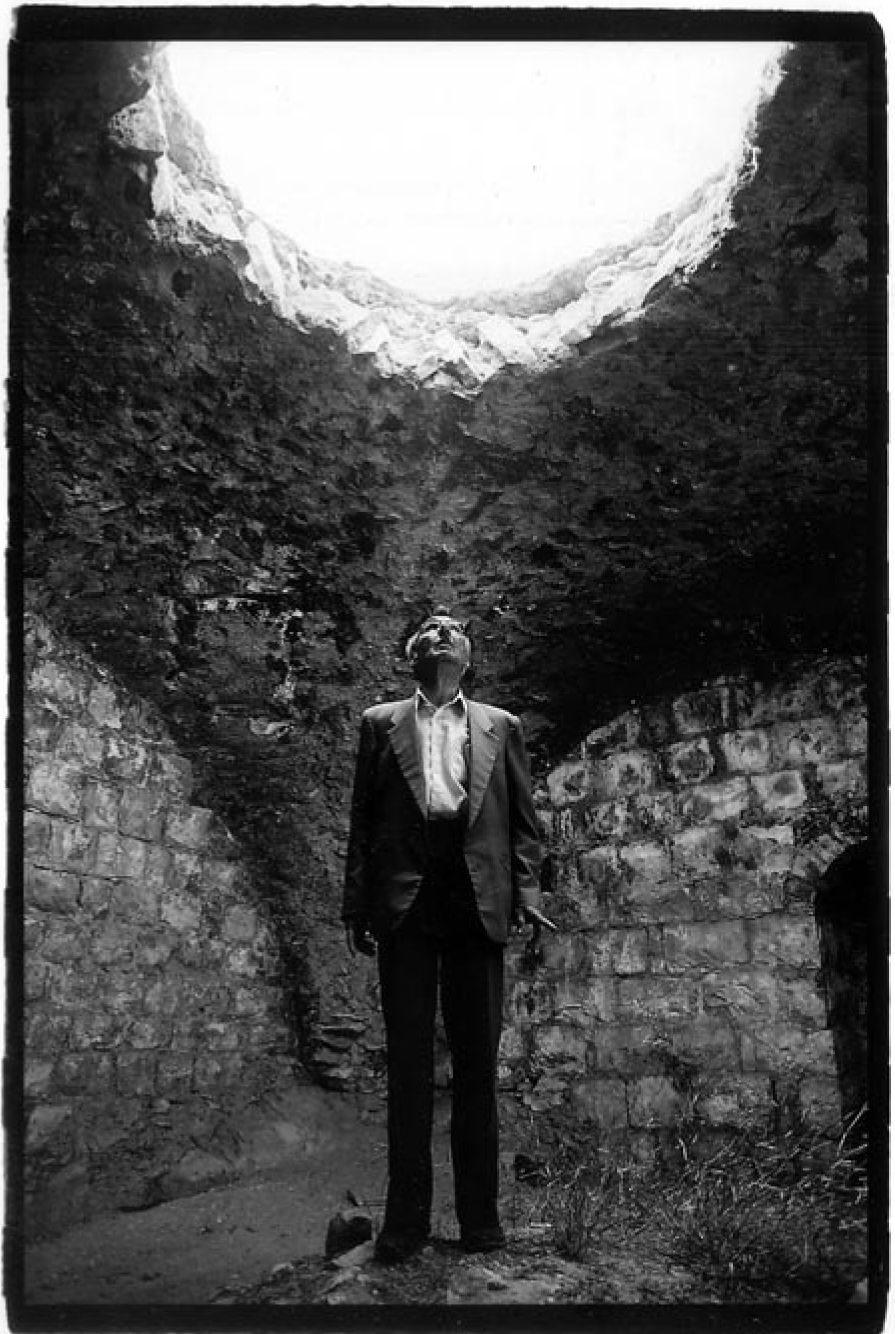
Many years passed before the connection between the Kalabians and the Dauss was renewed. "I heard the noise of the garden gate," Daus said, "and went outside. A silver-haired man was deciphering the secrets of the garden and the house to two women, as if he had lived there a long time. He was about 70, and they were half his age. I immediately identified him as a member of the Kalabian family. I wasn't surprised. He introduced himself as Doctor Vikan Kalabian, and introduced me to his two daughters. They had just arrived from Virginia, in the United States, where he had worked most of his life as a physician. I opened the whole house to them – how could I have done otherwise?"

The doctor, like his brother, the pharmacist from East Jerusalem who visited the house 32 years earlier, was overcome by excitement. Perhaps because he was, by nature, a man of moderation, he kept apologizing for hurrying back and forth, from one room to another.

"He didn't stop," Daus said, "even for a minute. Look, he said, as if uncovering a great secret, here's where we hid from father and mother, and pointed to a small storeroom, made of wood, that had been installed under the stone staircase connecting the two floors. He asked my permission to open the door to his 'secret nook,' knelt to look inside, and called his daughters – who were somewhat embarrassed – over to join him."

A tremendous sadness prevailed for a moment, says Aliza Daus. She offered her guests apricot jam she had made from the fruit of the tree in the garden. Doctor Kalabian tasted, and pondered, tasted and remembered when the tree was new, wondered whether it had been planted by him or by some other member of the family, and couldn't remember for certain. Suddenly, as if she had been shot out of where she sat, Daus left the kitchen for a few minutes, and returned carrying something wrapped in white, that she gave to Kalabian. He held the parcel with both hands, hesitantly, as if he was trying to decide what to do with it. Then he rested it on his knees, opened the white wrapping and found the old clock whose monotonous ticking had measured the family's life from its earliest days. He caressed the heavy timepiece as if it was a newborn, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Then, after the Kalabians left the house, they made their way down Disraeli Street and turned left, toward the Old City. The same route they took fifty years earlier, their first steps as refugees. Then they went empty handed, and now they carried the clock, hoping it would bring them good times.



Lifta, village: Guarding Jerusalem

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky
Text Haim Hanegbi

No one knows how old Lifta is, neither in years nor by generations. The village has no documents, neither an ID card nor a birth certificate. Nor is there anyone or anything to testify to its origins, except, perhaps, the attempt to identify Lifta with the biblical Mei Naftoach. But no one can mistake its residents, fellahin the sons of fellahin, who were forced under fire from Jewish fighters, members of the Haganah, the Etzel and the Lehi, to leave their homes and lands. All that occurred at the end of the British Mandate [December, 1947-January, 1948], a few months before the state was established, when the Nakba was running wild throughout the country under watchful British eyes.

Here are the words of David Ben Gurion in a meeting of Mapai leaders, 7 February 1948 [from Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1948, p. 79]:

“Coming to Jerusalem via Lifta-Romema, through Mahane Yehuda, King George Avenue and Mea Shearim – there are no foreigners [Arabs]. One hundred percent Jewish. Since the time Jerusalem was destroyed in Roman times – she has never been as Jewish as she is now. In many Arab neighborhoods in [west Jerusalem], not a single Arab can be seen. I don’t imagine that will change…”

“What happened in Jerusalem, and what happened in Haifa is likely to occur in large areas of the country – if we’ll succeed in holding on…and if we’ll hold on…it’s very likely that in the campaign’s coming six or eight or ten months great changes will take place…not all of them to our detriment. There will certainly be great changes in the composition of the country’s population.”

The village, stretched along a hillside, connects the valley at its feet with the hilltop above. The people of Lifta, like their generations of ancestors, frequently watched the roads leading from the coastal plain to Jerusalem, as if they were the guardians of the city’s threshold, keepers of its walls doing God’s bidding. They saw the soldiers of the Roman Legions coming up along the Roman road above them; they noted the horsemen of the first crusade gathering on the hill across from them for their first glimpse of the walls of the holy city on the horizon; they watched vehicles traveling on the road that cut across their lands, seeing the efforts made by the British, the Arabs and the Jews as they prepared for the fateful days ahead. They watched history unfold, curiously, naively, without realizing that the day was approaching when it would crush them, when they would become its innocent victims.

During the 1940’s – the world war had ended, the Jewish-Arab war not yet begun – Lifta had more than 2500 inhabitants and more than 400 houses. Construction of a large, spacious stone elementary school on the hillside was completed in 1945, in a location that could provide space for a sports field. The villagers felt their work was worthwhile, and their proximity to the large city also benefited them. They built new stores, established a social club and opened two coffee houses. But they also took care to preserve the older sites, both sacred and secular, such as the place to which they came to be uplifted spiritually [the memorial to the holy Sheikh Badr], or that which was nature’s gift [the village spring, whose water flowed without stopping].

On an autumn morning in November, 2000, we descended the steep hill to the heart of the village. We were careful, moving slowly. We helped one another, holding each other’s hand. We were afraid of slipping, of falling onto a jagged rock. Suleiman Abu Leil, who was about 20 years old when he was forced to become a refugee, was still light on his feet today. He recognized every house and every wall, and it was enough for him to see remnants of a wall in order to name the family who had lived there and tell us about it. [The photo shows Abu Leil in the house where he was born, standing on pieces of the ceiling, gazing at the piece of sky visible from inside the house. The large hole in the ceiling didn’t happen by chance. According to the native it was made by representatives of the government born out of the sin of the expulsion, who made holes in the abandoned buildings for fear their owners would return.]

Abu Leil leads us in his own way, on paths that we can see as well as those hidden from us. He knows that the sights of Lifta as it had once existed, as well as its odors and tastes and sounds, are gone, and won’t return. You, like us, have lost the magic of those days, says Abu Leil, and becomes silent. He sees a house whose construction was never completed, climbs the external stairs leading nowhere, looks around at the view and sits, lost in thought. Now he covers his face, as if to escape the reality for a moment, and lets out a silent sigh. A refugee’s sigh.

As I type the story of Lifta from the autumn of the year 2000, I’m reminded of the people of Lifta as they were during the British Mandate, as they came and went in the neighborhoods where I grew up, in Makor Baruch in west Jerusalem, every day, throughout the day. In the morning, on the way to school, I would pass the village women carrying their goods on their heads in woven baskets on their way to the improvised sites by the roadside where they would sell their products. Memory sharpens. Here’s the fig seller from HaHashmona’im

Street, and here's the woman selling sabras from HaTurim Street. Here are fresh eggs, there warm rolls. And almonds and pomegranates and grapes and everything. No market had fresher products, with no end to them. I remember faces, or maybe I'm only imagining them, here my sister, here my aunt, here my neighbor and here – I don't believe it! – Here's my mother. Mine, yours, his.

The Andre House - on the border of Beit Safafa

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky Text Haim Hanegbi

Adele Andre, a woman alone. She offers guests a fabric-covered sofa and a leather chair, comfortable and relaxing. She herself chooses a bony, wicker chair, sits on the edge of the seat. She says that's how she'll be sure, even if she gets caught up in memories of the family home, which once existed and is no more, to stay alert, ready at any moment to spring up in order to prove the truth of what she's saying with examples and evidence she keeps close at hand. Once she rises to pull a faded document from a drawer, again to take down a photograph from the wall. A woman alone, guarding the family legacy.

The family home, says Adele, was like a palace to us. She apologizes for having trouble remembering, a difficulty that grows as the years pass. Instead of her memory serving her, she says, it has become an obstacle, controlling her. Details, more details, and more details and even more details.

Here is the house, as if cast of stone, the first floor roughly hewn stone, the second floor finely chiseled. Here are the entry stairs leading to the home's entry hall, which narrow as they climb. Here are the windowsills, the shutters, the kitchen and dining room, the rooms and corridors. Even the carved furniture, the woven curtains, the exposures and how the light falls, the colors and odors. All the secrets of the palace are hidden in memories.

The courtyard, Adele says, served us – Teresa, my mother, Joseph, my father, and five daughters – as a large country estate, a place of life, in Jerusalem, on the eastern border of Beit Safafa. Sixty-two dunams

surrounded by a stone wall with an iron gate. Ninety-three trees, she remembers, were planted in the large courtyard, pine trees and olive trees. Every year we would produce 40-50 containers of olive oil says this fragile woman, proudly, as if she was a fellah's daughter. She remembers the chickens clucking, the doves cooing, the dog barking. A few farm animals.

A knot of identities, hard to undo. The mother's family is from Italy, the father's from France. Christians who moved east at the beginning of the 19th century, reached Beirut and then came to Jerusalem and settled in Bethlehem, became intertwined, married, had many descendants, were merchants, built homes and became natives.

Adele Andre is multi-lingual. Arabic and French and Italian and English she knows perfectly, and her Hebrew is also good. She has a pair of passports, French and Israeli. Her treasury of documents preserves an ID card from the Palestine Mandate. My heart aches, she says, at the bitter fate of the Palestinians, with whom we always lived together, and lived well among them.

Adele's body is weary, but her eyes shine. Even when she becomes sad, there's still a hint of a smile on her face. She rises to accompany her guests to the "family estate," to show them what that great war did to the lost paradise of her mother, Teresa, and her father, Joseph.

She takes a cane from a corner of the room, hangs it from her arm, then opens a decorated wooden box standing near the edge of the table, removes two large, heavy black keys, like small totems, the work of an ironsmith, puts them in her purse. One is the key to the gate in the wall, she says, and the other is the key to the house – keys to memory.

Along the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, Adele tells the driver to turn right, toward Beit Safafa. She remembers Km. 5, a milestone indicating the fifth kilometer, erected by the British. That was the midpoint, she says, between the two cities. After a minute or two she tells the driver to stop. Here, she says, marking our field of vision with her cane, from here you can see everything.

Everything - nothing. Nothing remains standing, testifying to origins. No large house, no stone wall, no grove of trees. Not even remnants. In their place yawns a large, open pit, as if a broad field had been uprooted from the earth and tossed away. At the bottom of this hellhole, pulverized into powder by heavy earthmoving equipment, asphalt has been abundantly spread, to level the surface. No chickens cluck, no doves coo, no dog barks here, only the squeal of brakes and the noise of engines and the wailing of sirens. A place of family rest transformed into a huge, broad parking lot for buses.

At the end of 1947, during the first days of the war, the family was not disturbed, in the gap between the front lines. They packed a few belongings and sheltered behind the walls of the St. Clare convent (Claris), on Hebron Road, until calm returned. At first, Adele says, we'd go to our house every day, to feed Bobby, the dog, taking something from the house or from the yard. But this arrangement was quickly disrupted. The front drew closer, until the house was taken by Jewish fighters who turned it into a sort of military position, perhaps a small base.

A few months later the fighting became more orderly and the front lines stabilized. Adele remembers an Israeli general named Gur ordering the few refugees who had gathered in the monastery's courtyard to move

to abandoned buildings in Baq'a. We were all together in a closed area, they called it a "zone," says Adele, but they sometimes allowed us, with the army's permission, to visit our house and the yard. That was before the great disaster occurred.

Adele points to family photographs hanging on the wall. She removes two of them.
Her eyes moisten a little, she apologizes. One day my father and two of my sisters went to the house. With permission, of course, Adele says, we wouldn't move without permission. None of the soldiers who were there warned them about anything. Not a word about mines. Suddenly, a huge explosion. One of my sisters was killed on the spot, a second was brought, wounded, to the hospital and died immediately afterward. And father, thank God, was only lightly wounded in the foot and treated successfully. Here's my Liz; here's my Fabian. Adele brings the photographs closer, almost hugging them, moves them away again, gazes at them and is silent.

The Andre family's dead were first buried in the courtyard of the Ratisbone Monestary, in the heart of west Jerusalem, and later moved to the cemetery at the Notre Dame de Sion convent in Ein Karem. The circle has been closed, she says – now, for the first time, she allows herself a silent sigh, that echoes loudly against the walls of the room – the circle is closed, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem to Ein Karem, always, always close to home.

The Baramki home – Musrara

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky
Text Haim Hanegbi

A house like a memorial. "One of the most magnificent residential buildings in the northern part of the city," according to David Kroyanker, the Israeli architect. The year of the Palestinian disaster, when the residents of the house became refugees, Israeli soldiers replaced them. A family oasis on the edge of the Musrara neighborhood, next to Mea Shearim, became a combat position. The doors and windows were blocked, first with sandbags and then by poured concrete. The place from which members of the household would gaze on the beauties of the surrounding landscape, seeing the northern edges of the city touching the land of the surrounding villages, now became a fortified military site. For 19 years, from 1948 to 1967, Israeli soldiers peered through the houses slits at what was happening on the road beneath them: It was the single official transit point between the two parts of the city, and was known as the Mandlebaum Gate.

Police and soldiers. Israelis on one side, Jordanians on the other. Sometimes facing each other, sometimes side by side. They moved around among concrete barriers, barbed wire, as if they were imprisoned together. From time to time, based on mutual agreement and legally signed official documents, these friendly enemies opened the gate so that diplomats, UN personnel, pilgrims, journalists and secret agents could pass from one side to the other. Even Israeli soldiers – disguised as policemen – would cross through the gate at regular intervals to relieve those stationed in the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus, that included the buildings of the

Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital – in accordance with the terms of the Israeli-Jordanian armistice agreement.

The building, known in Israel as the Turjeman House, or the Turjeman position, was damaged by war twice, in 1948 and in 1967. The damage was not repaired: it was preserved by an Israeli decision that was made immediately after the capture of the eastern part of Jerusalem, as a witness. The entire building, inside and out, is a kind of mini-museum today, telling the story of Jerusalem, according to an Israeli version slightly more moderate than the accepted official line, of a multi-faceted city whose components sometimes weave themselves together, and sometimes come apart. A place where, for better or worse, two nations, three religions, many peoples and traditions have come together, a site both sacred and secular.

The building was constructed in 1934 by Andoni Baramki, one of the most gifted Palestinian architects working during the Mandate, as his home. The land on which the house (whose charm became renowned) stands, was originally owned by Hassan Bey Turjeman, a member of a wealthy Palestinian family, whose ancestors arrived in Jerusalem in the 11th century. He transferred it in return for architectural work Baramki did for him in the same area. Turjeman, it is important to note, is also a common family name among Jews, which may be the reason it stuck in the minds of Israelis and became part of the accounts of the battle for Jerusalem and a well-known Israeli symbol.

The Baramkis spent their first years as refugees in Gaza. They left in 1953 and moved to the village of Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah, half an hour's drive from Jerusalem. Occasionally, when they'd come to East Jerusalem, they'd climb to the roof of the YMCA, from which they could see the house they dreamed about in West Jerusalem, on the other side of the border. And always, always, they say, the elder Baramki would stand silently, motionless, as if he were carrying out a ceremony whose rituals were known only to him, fixing his gaze on the house. Then, after a long minute, and without any member of the family having said anything, he would gather them all around him and vow, always with the same words, "God willing, the day will come and we will all return to our home, to live as we had lived, and we now need only one thing – patience."

They also recount that a few weeks after the capture of East Jerusalem, when Palestinians were allowed to come to the city and leave it, the elder Baramki hurried, impatiently, from Bir Zeit to the house of his dreams that he had designed and built 33 years earlier. Gabi Baramki, the eldest son, who became the president of Bir Zeit University, accompanied his father. I didn't want him to be alone at such an emotional moment, he said. He was growing old, and I feared for his health.

When they were half a kilometer from the house, said Gabi Baramki, father told the driver who was taking us to stop. He wanted to arrive at the house walking at a moderate pace, to see it first from a distance, in order to see the changes that had taken place around it. Then he crossed the road and drew near the house. Israeli bulldozers were parked nearby, busy destroying and removing any sign of the former border. Father pushed forward frantically until he could place his hand on the wall of the house and feel its stones. He went from one corner to another, examining the signs of destruction and estimating the damage. He appeared as if he was trying to ease the building's pain, as if it were a wounded, helpless animal.

Andoni Baramki did not rest after that day. He made a weekly pilgrimage to the house, as if he were fulfilling a commandment and the house a holy site. But he also dealt with mundane matters: armed with documents proving his ownership, he demanded that the Israeli authorities return the house to him, as law and justice

demanded, but was met – as if this were obvious – with a definite refusal, based on the conventional argument, first heard in 1948 and still heard today, that the building is “absentee property.” Once they even tried to tempt him with “compensation” – based on a 1934 property valuation. But Baramki, whose sense of honor kept him calm, rejected the offer, quietly scornful. He died in 1972, a refugee who kept his dream until his final day.

After some years had passed, the directorate of the museum invited Gabi Baramki to join its board of trustees. Before discussing the offer, the Palestinian demanded that the Israelis add to the sign at the museum dedicated to the history of the building and the changes it underwent, that it is owned by the Baramki family. The Israelis refused, and so did the Palestinian.

The Sakakini House – Katamon

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky Text Haim Hanegbi

"The war continues, becomes more intense. One night passes, then another, and we're awake, unable to sleep. We stand on the ground floor of the house, behind sandbags, not sitting or resting for a moment."
"The war continues, becomes more intense, and reaches a climax on Thursday night, 29 April 1948. The earth collapsed beneath our feet, and the house almost fell in on us. Until dawn broke, and Ibrahim abu-Di'a appeared, coming from the battlefield only a few steps from our home, disheveled and covered in dust, his shirt tattered from shrapnel – he was unrecognizable – and said: Most of my men have been killed..."

On Friday morning, April 30, the Sakakinis left their home in the heart of Katamon to make their way as refugees. Their telephone, whose number was 2373, allowed its owner one final call at dawn, and then no more. Until that day the neighborhood slowly emptied of its inhabitants. The beautiful neighborhood of middle class Palestinian families, which had for some time been a battleground, a routine of firing and shelling and hellish bombing. Formally, the British still ruled the country, but in fact the war developed right under their noses, as if they were not there: the Mandate would end in two weeks, and Israel's establishment would be declared. The Sakakinis might have been among the last residents of Katamon to flee. Two days later, on May 2, in the Victoria Hotel in Cairo, the elder Sakakini and his two daughters, Domiya and Hala, sat close to the radio: the announcer reported from Jerusalem that the fighting in Katamon had ended – woe, woe to those who listened – with the neighborhood's capture by the Jews - a mini-homeland,.

Halil al-Sakakini, the son of Kastandi and Maryam, was 70 years old when he was exiled from his land. He was renowned throughout the Arab world. An author, poet and scholar, he was one of the founders of the modern national Palestinian educational system. In 1909, aged 31 he established al-Madrasa al-Dusturiyya in Jerusalem, the first Arab national school in the country, innovative and controversial. Sakakini opposed punishments and humiliation, eliminated exams and homework, did away with diplomas and prizes, encouraged openness in relations between pupils and teachers, introduced sports. Al-Dusturiyya, free of religious or ethno-communal oversight, was open to all. Among its pupils were also some Jews – for example, the children of the Mani, Moyal and Amzaleg families, members of the veteran Sephardic Jewish community of Jerusalem.

Sakakini was a complete Arabist – immersed in Arab language, literature, culture and politics. He wrote books that led to a great revolution in the method of teaching Arabic: for years they were the leading textbooks in Palestine and throughout the Arab world. According to his daughters' testimony, those books put an end to the family's wanderings among rented apartments in Jerusalem. The royalties, say Domiya and Hala, helped their mother and father build their house in Katamon. In May, 1937, the Sakakinis opened their new home, and were inordinately proud of it.
In a letter to his son, Sari, who was in the United States studying political science, Sakakini revealed his intention to call the house "The Island" – "After all, the Arabian Peninsula is known as an "island," and it's actually only a peninsula." The house was the family's pride and joy. Not only was it a source of entertainment and enjoyment, but they wrote poetry and philosophized about it. They named its rooms after Arab cities: Sana, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo. Cordova, in Andalusia, which under Moslem rule in Spain had been an international center of science and arts, a cultural paradise, was also a room in the Sakakini home.

"The house, the house, we speak only about the house," Sakakini revealed to his diary right after it was opened. "When people ask me how I am, I reply that the house is spacious. When they ask where I've been, I tell them I've been at home. When they ask me where I'm going, I tell them I'm going home." He even considered calling the entry gates, "the gates to eternity." Who could have imagined then that, eleven years later, no more than an instant of historical time, the country, the city, the neighborhood, the house would all be transformed beyond recognition, and people who once were rooted in place would become refugees.

"We packed a few clothes that we needed," Sakakini wrote, "and left the rest of our belongings in our house, until our return." The papers, the notebooks, the books. The furniture, the piano, the refrigerator. Even the narghila, "my other brain," was left behind. So were valuable items that had been left in trust with him, "deposited with us by their owners, who believed our house was a fortress, impregnable, able to shatter the arms of those who try to breach its walls." He particularly mourned the loss of his books, too numerous to count. "I clung to them day and night," he wrote. "Everyone who visited me…found me immersed in a book…Have you been plundered? Burned? Moved – with all due honor and respect – to some public or private library? Are you sitting on grocers' shelves, your pages used to wrap onions?" Some nineteen years after going into exile, the Sakakini daughters discovered the books' fate.

Shortly after the year of the Palestinian disaster, Hala Sakakini, in her first place of exile, Heliopolis, Egypt, sketched her map of Katamon. People, houses and streets, memories carefully documented: The families – Faraj and Mansour and Haddad and Saruji and Talil and Damiani and Murkus and Huri and Kabbah and Taji and Uwwad and Ju'arish and Kasasiyya and Budeiri and Lu'asidis and Albineh and Jama'in. And the Iraqi consulate and the Semiramis Hotel and the Claridge Hotel. And Antoinette the seamstress, and Hana

the tailor and Bazuzi the butcher. And Russians and Armenians and Greeks. And the church of St. Theresa. And the police station. And in the absence of street names, they are identified on the map of her memory by the number of the bus line, No. 4 and No. 37.

Five years after they went into exile, only the two daughters, Domiya and Hala, were left to guard the family's memory. Sultana, their mother, the queen of the family, who died in 1939, some two years after they moved into the house, took its joy with her and left her husband grieving deeply, a grief that persisted until the day he died. He passed away at the end of 1953, tormented by sorrow, just three months after Sari, his eldest, died, only 40 years old. Katamon's refugees, dispersed. The mother was buried in Jerusalem, the father and son in Cairo, the daughters remained alone.

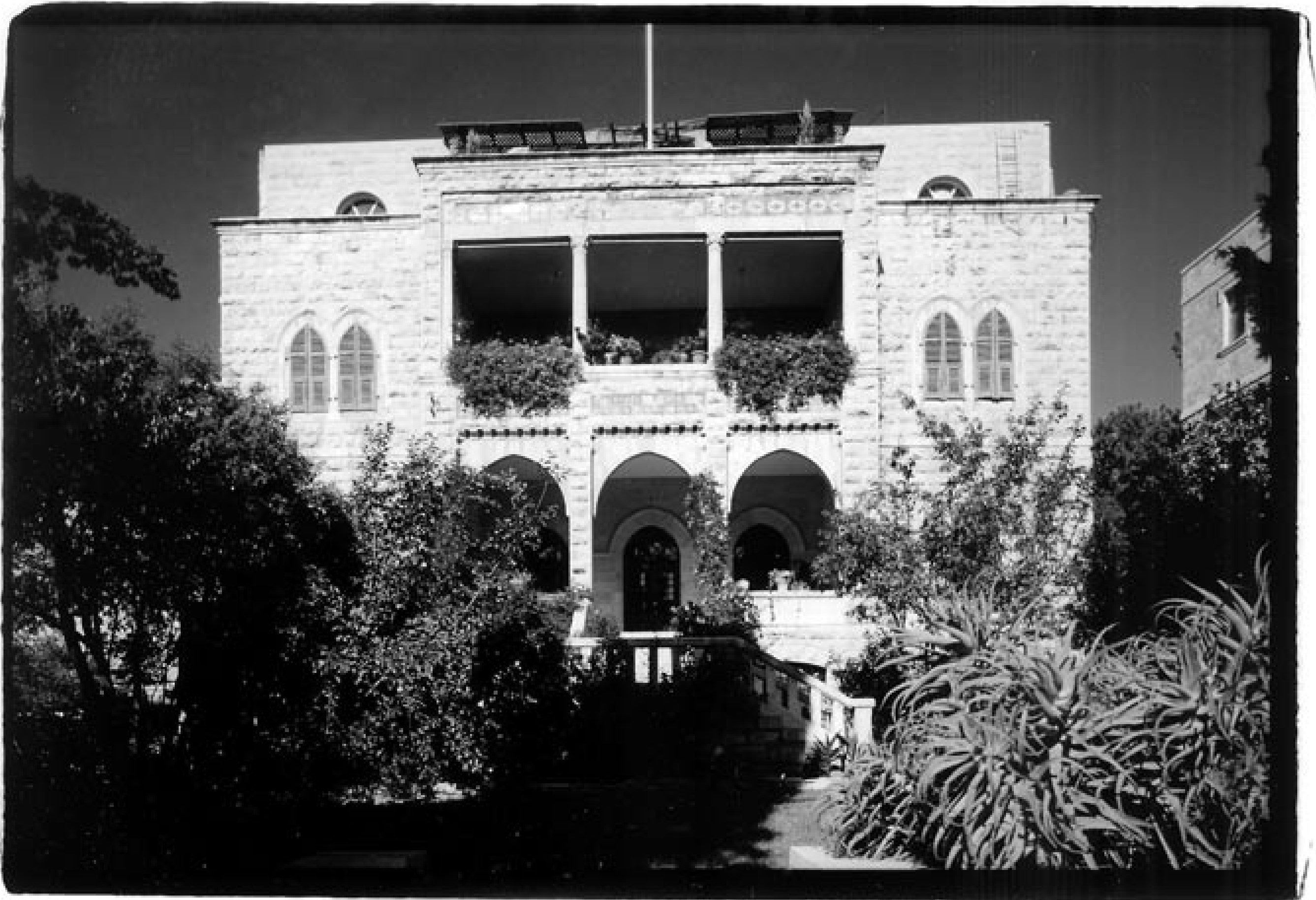
In 1953, five years after the year of the disaster, Domiya and Hala Sakakini returned – to, in their words, what was left of Palestine – and settled in Ramallah. So near to Katamon, yet so far. A rigid Jordanian-Israeli border divided them from the family's home that came to life over and over in their memories, as if they had left only yesterday.

In 1967, a month after the Six Day War, when people were allowed to go from one part of Jerusalem to the other, the Sakakini daughters made their way on foot into Katamon, yearning. Now, in the heart of the Jewish neighborhood called Gonen, on Yordei HaSira Street, Number 8, they found what had been, in their youth, the Sakakini house, their mother's and father's and son's and two daughters', and the house of relatives and friends and guests from near and from far. A building that housed a committee of wise men who considered all aspects of Palestinian life ceased in an instant to exist under the blows of the weapons of war and became, over time, with the help of contributions from American Jews, a WIZO nursery and kindergarten.

When they heard rumors that their father's large, renowned library was being held in the Hebrew University National Library, they went there. We introduced ourselves, they said, and were taken to one of the senior librarians. He was courteous, but what he had to say was harsh. You have no right to claim anything, he said, because each volume individually, and all of them together, are abandoned property. He may have seen us look amazed, and perhaps also angry, they said, for he repeated that since 1948 all Palestinian property, books, buildings, fields, villages, towns, has become the property of the state of Israel.

Domiya and Hala asked at least to be permitted to view the books, maybe touch them, page through them, but the librarian, obstinate, agreed to show them just one book, only one, whichever they chose, whichever they remembered. We knew that father didn't write his name in the books, they said, but would make notes on the page margins. We selected "The Beggars," by Al-Jahdh, a ninth century encyclopedist. And, in fact, after some time the librarian returned, holding the book. He let us page through it in front of him, as if we were dangerous culture robbers, and waited for us to return it.

The sisters made no more memory journeys. They had seen enough, experienced enough.



Villa Haroun al-Rashid – Talbieh

Photography Tzachi Ostrovsky Text Haim Hanegbi

The building at 18 Marcus Street, on the western border of the Talbieh neighborhood – two stories of roughly chiseled stone – displays its elegance immediately. The entry stairs to the ground floor, slightly raised, lead to a covered porch crowned by arches. Above each arch, a band of colored ceramic tiles. The front garden of the house is like an orchard. A wide, well-maintained lawn, cactus and fig and pomegranate, as well as herbs and a profusion of flowers, all interwoven inseparably. Sometimes, when the sunlight falls just in the right direction, the bougainvillea bushes climbing up the front of 18 Marcus Street make the stone façade glow with a purple sheen.

The building, built in 1926, was much honored by its owner, Hana Ibrahim Bisharat. On the band of ceramic tiles high on the façade of the upper story the name of the building appears in colorful, stylized letters, the work of Armenian craftsmen, residents of East Jerusalem for generations: "Villa Haroun al-Rashid," in Arabic and in English, to commemorate the famous eighth century Baghdad caliph. Two floors, two spacious apartments. During its first years the villa was used by the Bisharat family, then rented to tenants. During the 1940's the villa housed the headquarters of the RAF. The Mandatory authorities did not confiscate Villa Haroun al-Rashid; they rented it legally. The British flag flew from a tall mast erected on the roof. The headquarters were located on the lower floor, and the commander lived on the upper floor. The name of the 'Abbasid' caliph, visible from a distance, didn't disturb the rest of the empire's officers. After some years had passed, Israel decided to turn the upper floor into a minister's official residence. The lower floor became, by the decision of the new state, a private apartment owned by an Israeli VIP (the Supreme Court Justice Zvi Berenson).

Later, when Golda Meir moved into the official residence at 18 Marcus Street, she noticed the Arabic lettering on the band of ceramic tiles on the façade, and got annoyed. She must have thought that foreign visitors to her official residence would use it against Israel. Perhaps she feared that this al-Rashid will encourage them to investigate and inquire and ask her about the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular, and by doing so raise issues that official Israel prefers to be forgotten. She may even not have known that this caliph was renowned, that his name was famous in the West thanks to the tales of the Thousand and One Nights, and known in Europe because of his relations with Charlemagne, his contemporary, king of the Franks, emperor of the west.

In any case, here's what happened to Haroun al-Rashid sometime toward the end of the 1950's, or maybe at the beginning of the 1960's: Golda Meir had a meeting scheduled with Dag Hammerskjold, the UN Secretary General, in her official residence. Shortly before the meeting, Israeli security personnel arrived and, armed with hammers, climbed up to the band of colorful ceramic tiles above the upper balcony, on which appeared the ineffable name, "Villa Haroun al-Rashid," and shattered them with the tools they were holding. Many years have since passed, but you can still see, even from the street, the shattered tiles.

Hana Bisharat, the homeowner who became a refugee, appeared once at the gate of 18 Marcus Street, like an anonymous son appearing out of nowhere to remind of what was forgotten. One of the residents of the house said that this occurred in 1955, around the time of Israel's seventh independence celebration. Bisharat came into the front garden and spoke to someone on the path who had just come out of the house: "I am Hana Bisharat, the owner of this house," he said, pointing to the two-story building, "and I've come to find out when you plan to return it to me." The resident froze in his tracks for a moment, looked at the stranger dressed in an expensive suit, wondering whether he was naïve or only acting as if he didn't know any better. Other residents of the building joined them, also looking at the stranger who'd invaded their garden, wondering about him. They may even have been afraid of him when they realized that he was firm in his belief that his rights, both as the person who built the house and as its owner, didn't diminish with the passage of time. To the contrary – very much to the contrary – they grew stronger.

When Hana Ibrahim Bisharat turned to the garden gate, one of the residents asked how he had been able to enter Israel. "On an American passport," he replied. He lingered another moment for a farewell glance at his Haroun al-Rashid, and went back into exile.

The exhibit is dedicated to the memory of Faisal al-Husseini

About ten years ago we came to Faisal al-Husseini with the idea of encouraging Palestinians who had become refugees from west Jerusalem – they themselves, or their parents – and who had lived in the city for generations, to talk about the Nakba. We asked him for help, and he willingly agreed: locating the buildings, identifying the families, collecting testimonies, building trust, everything.

We listened to the Nakba's refugees, photographed their homes on this side of the Green Line, and tried to capture the moment when they were parted from them. The help we received from the staff of the Orient House was what enabled us to retrieve the little we were able to recover from the depths of forgetting and denial, before Faisal al-Husseini died and his Orient House was captured and looted and sealed by Israel.

Sa'id Abu al-Nahas al-Mutasha'il, the unfortunate "pessoptimist," already told us once, with the help of Emile Habibi, who we fondly remember and who received the Israel Prize in literature: "I disappeared from sight, but didn't leave this site." And perhaps that's what he wanted to teach us, that between "disappearing from sight" and "the site we still inhabit" there are connections hidden from the eye, and the dead might not be dead and he who passed away might not have passed away, and he who went to a better world might still be wandering around our world. That's what suddenly burst out of oblivion on the day of Faisal Husseini's funeral, and it gives us no rest.

Habibi, who gave us his well-known book, The Wonderful Tale of the Pessoptimist's Disappearance, asked in his will to inscribe only three words on his gravestone: "Ba'aki Fi Haifa," which in English means, "I remained in Haifa." Faisal al-Husseini needed no such defiance. Habibi's generation passed away, and al-Husseini's generation arrived, and avowal has taken the place of denial. Here, thus, al-Husseini's "I remained in Jerusalem" became something natural, self-evident, a birthright recognized by all – well, almost all.

Official Israel, angry and sullen, was forced to act against its will on the day of the funeral. It pulled its soldiers back to the side of the road from Ramallah to Jerusalem, shut down the checkpoints along the road and opened a direct route to the mosques on the Temple Mount and the plaza surrounding them. Thus, the funeral procession became a flow of nationalism, and Jerusalem became, at least for a moment, the capital of Palestine. So, briefly, it seemed.

It was as if the departed, who was known to all, returned to life, to the sound of cheering that spilled over the walls, to wake the people and the land.

In the reception room at the Orient House, where Faisal al-Husseini used to welcome his guests, a painting hung on the wall: A glassblower sat before a flaming furnace, holding in his hand an iron rod at the end of which was an incandescent mass, as if a piece had been torn from the sun. Perhaps, one of the guests might have thought, this glowing mass, this molten glass, is a hint that the craftsman has already taken hold of the material but has not yet finished working it, and its final shape is still only a vision.