



REFLECTIONS ON AL-NAKBA

To most Palestinians, 1948, the year of al-Nakba, is the formative year of their lives. This is true irrespective of age, background, or occupation, or whether the person is a refugee or not, or lives in Palestine or the diaspora. On this fiftieth anniversary of al-Nakba, JPS asked a number of Palestinians of different generations and walks of life to write short pieces on what this event has meant to them.

In JPS's letters of invitation, the "guidelines" suggested were to avoid political and historical analysis in favor of personal reflections. The following are the results.

MAMDOUH NOFAL

Mamdouh Nofal was born in Qalqilya, Palestine, in 1944. He has held a succession of high military posts in the Palestinian movement. In Tunis as of 1988, he was a member of the Higher Coordinating Committee for the intifada. He participated in the Madrid Conference in 1991, served on the Higher Steering Committee for Palestinian Negotiations, and is a member of the PLO Central Committee. Permitted by Israel to return to Palestine in March 1996, he lives in Ramallah. He is the author of two books (in Arabic) on the peace process.

The closest I can come to explaining what 1948 means to me, and how it affected the path I took in life and the choices I made, is to tell about growing up in Qalqilya, on the frontline with Israel.

When the dust of 1948 settled, Qalqilya itself had not been occupied, falling in what came to be called the West Bank. But it had lost more than 90 percent of its agricultural lands, its main source of livelihood, which were now farmed by the Jewish colonies across the railroad tracks that had once linked Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and which now formed the border with the newly created State of Israel. The war had also transformed Qalqilya into a main station for refugees fleeing the massacres and the fighting in Kfar Saba, Abu Kishk, Miska, Byar Adas, Shaykh Muwwanis, and al-Tireh, who increased the town's population by half.

It is difficult, after the passage of fifty years, to sort out my own memories from those of my family, neighbors, friends, and schoolmates, from the collective memory of my hometown. But it seems to me that of the battles for the defense of the town, I have vague memories of the young men organizing night and day guard shifts and of the Iraqi army camp and the Palestinian military formations near town. I also remember the throngs of refugees in the mosque next door to our house. The girls' school and the boys' school

were also turned into refugee centers, and there was chaos everywhere as the town didn't have the means to absorb such a huge influx. Some of the refugees settled in our town and live there to this day, while others moved inward to other towns or onward to exile, due to the difficulty of making a living and the scarcity of water resources.

So our town, which had been self-sufficient and relatively comfortable, became destitute virtually overnight, cut off from its livelihood of orchards and farmlands on the coastal plain and cattle breeding and trade with al-Tireh, al-Taybeh, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Lydda, and Ramla. The conditions of the original townspeople abruptly deteriorated to abject poverty, such that there wasn't much difference between them and the refugees. Hunger spread, and if it hadn't been for the huge quantities of dates provided by the Iraqi government, many would have died. I remember that we children used to gather the date pits and sell them to bakeries—a full basket for one piaster. We were also set to gathering firewood and dry vegetable stems for cooking fuel and grasses and wild herbs for the rabbits and sheep.

The dire situation of Qalqilya's inhabitants was taken into consideration after the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was set up in 1950 and welfare cards were distributed along with emergency and fixed rations to everyone, except that the rations for Qalqilya's original citizens were only half as much as those given to the refugees. I will always remember the number of my family's welfare card: 58610405. That same year, the United Nations established a hospital on premises that the Iraqi army had used as an emergency center and opened schools for refugee children. Thus international aid became Qalqilya's main source of livelihood. I still remember the long queues for milk in the mornings and the little skirmishes that sometimes broke out when provisions were distributed.

A National Guard was set up in Qalqilya, and many of the young men joined, their main job being to keep watch on the Israeli border from the trenches dug on the outskirts of town. We children used to amuse ourselves running back and forth between their positions, and some of the guards would send us on errands to buy cigarettes or matches they had run out of. We also used to compete in seeing who was boldest in sneaking into the old orchards and placing rocks or pouring motor oil on the railway tracks, hoping the Jewish train would skid. But the train kept moving back and forth relentlessly, blowing its shrill whistle each time it neared our town.

After the establishment of the State of Israel and the departure of the Arab armies, Qalqilya's inhabitants began to realize that this would be a long story. The educated youth set their minds on going abroad. Some entered the Gulf countries illegally, and some even died of suffocation hidden inside oil tanks. Men sold the jewelry of their women and tried to reclaim the poor mountainous lands that remained on our side of the border, digging out rocks and filling the holes with soil to plant vegetables. They also dug many artesian wells using primitive methods, and we kids used to hang around while the work was going on. They bought generators and pumps to irrigate

the orchards that were left and set up what could be described as small agricultural cooperatives, some of which are still functioning.

Throughout the years, the people of Qalqilya and the refugees dreamed of returning to their fields and villages. During the earlier years, their sleep was disturbed by nightmares involving Jews hounding them and chasing them out, and they brooded about how the Arab countries had conspired against them and the whole world shared in the injustice meted out to them.

As time went on, al-Nakba was transformed into a memory that the people of Qalqilya went on commemorating with school holidays and demonstrations in the streets and near the Israeli border. As children we would roam the streets, happy with our holiday from school, brandishing flags and banners denouncing the Partition and demanding the return of refugees to their homes, and chanting in imitation of the grown-ups: "Down with Britain! Down with Israel!!" and "Hajj Amin, the Sword of Islam!"

Some of the town's imams saw Qalqilya's tribulations as a sign of God's anger at Palestinians for having gone astray. Many people resorted increasingly to religion, some even joining the Islamic Tahrir Party. A handful reacted by turning their backs on religion, saying God had abandoned them and had not stood up for the holy places in the blessed Land of Palestine (though they refused to join the Communist Party because the Soviet Union had recognized the State of Israel). My father, who was practically illiterate, joined the ranks of the independent nonbelievers. My illiterate mother, on the other hand, became more devout and urged me and my older brother to pray, to fast, and to learn the Qur'an by heart. Following her instructions, I prayed five times a day and often repeated the *ayat al-kursi*, which she said would protect whoever memorized it from the devil and the attacks of the Israelis. For many years, I would race to be the first to reach the mosque after the dawn call to prayer, sometimes arriving before the imam, and I would stand right behind him in the front row of worshippers. This earned me the reward of sweets from a devout relative. Later on, this same relative used to give me schoolbooks and pencils, particularly during the numerous stretches that my father spent in Jordanian prisons for "infiltration" into Israel.

After the Free Officers Revolution in Egypt in 1952, a strong Nasirist current spread among the youth; when I was older, I myself joined their ranks. Those days, whoever did not own a firearm tried to get one, though weapons had to be carefully concealed as the Jordanian police frequently conducted searches and confiscated whatever they found. Many young men carried out a variety of dangerous actions inside Israel, and some established relations with the Egyptian Secret Service. Many were imprisoned by Jordan, where infiltration was an act punishable by prison (the sentence could last several years if a firearm had actually been used). Many of Qalqilya's sons were killed, including fathers and relatives of friends of mine, when they sneaked across to "steal" a cow or horse or some clothes or water pipes or whatever they could lay their hands on in the Jewish colonies or harvest

whatever crops they could in what had been their orchards and fields. No one in our town could be convinced that the fruits of their lands, still within sight just across the tracks, did not belong to them anymore.

There were countless such "infiltrations." Our town was often awakened by the sound of gunfire between its young men and Israeli troops or guards from the Jewish colonies. On such nights, people would wait tensely, ready to move to neighborhood mosques better able to withstand shelling; people still believed that "the houses of God had a Lord to protect them" and that God could deflect artillery if He so desired. And people would pray "May God spare us! O Merciful Lord, drive the Israelis blind and be merciful to our men!" Many times, my father was one of those in need of such prayers.

When one of the men was martyred, everyone would know because the wails and screams of women and children would tear through the stillness of the night, and all the inhabitants would be at their doors. The children would wake up, all anxious and perturbed, clinging to the skirts of our mothers, and if the town was under shelling we boys would rush out into the alleys once it stopped to be among the men. As kids, I remember how our anxiety would be calmed as we listened to the men's talk, eavesdropping on the latest news which we would carry back to our mothers, scared and worried. The town would live through a state of genuine sorrow after the loss of a martyr. To show solidarity, everyone would walk in the funeral procession after prayers over the dead man's body and then sit with the family throughout the three days of condolence offering. And during these times we children would hear the stories of infiltration into the colonies and skirmishes with the Jews, of courage and cowardice, of life and death, of paradise and hell, of the special status of the martyrs before God, and of the behavior of the Jordanian Secret Service. They were exciting and terrifying stories, almost like mystery tales, imprinted in our memories.

The *mujahidun* and the infiltrators from our town harassed the neighboring colonies for over five years. Israel stepped up the pressure on Jordan, which it held responsible for the security of the borders, and did not hesitate to use artillery and machine-gun fire against the town or to position snipers to shoot whoever came near the border. A number of men, women, and children (including relatives and schoolmates) were killed that way. In the early 1950s, the Israeli troops began to follow a more aggressive policy, carrying out numerous punitive raids against houses of alleged infiltrators and the town's wells. In 1953, Moshe Dayan threatened to raze Qalqilya to the ground. As Israeli pressures on Jordan increased, so did Jordan's pressures on Qalqilya. The Jordanian Secret Service, police, and army clamped down on the infiltrators, and Jordanian courts meted out harsher sentences on those who got caught. The better known among the infiltrators were imprisoned for long terms even if they had not been caught red-handed. My father was one of these. The families of the imprisoned men were left without any source of income. My own family lived off the meager sums that other infiltrators paid in order to use my father's old machine gun.

Despite all the measures taken by the Israelis and the Jordanians, frequent skirmishes between the people of our town and Israeli troops and the colonists continued until 10 October 1956. At 9 P.M. on that date, Israeli forces launched a large-scale offensive against Qalqilya. Ground forces, including tanks, attacked from three directions, and warplanes bombed the town. They targeted the police station, which they destroyed completely, killing everyone inside. They also destroyed the wells the people had dug. The men of the National Guard and the regular Jordanian army unit stationed in town fought bravely, and over twenty were martyred. In return our men killed many of the attacking forces, including the commander. After Qalqilya was occupied in 1967, some Israeli officers built a memorial on Soufin Hill where he had been killed, the remains of which are still there.

I still have clear images of the martyrs pulled out of the debris of the police station, and I will never forget the funeral procession, when all the men, women, and children of the town walked from the mosque to the local cemetery. For days on, my siblings and I accompanied our mother in visiting the homes of the grieving families, and I vividly recall the wailing of the bereaved and the incantation of Qur'anic verses by blind shaykhs. For weeks afterward, my schoolmates and I would rush out the minute classes ended to inspect the ruins of the police station and other blown-up buildings.

When Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967, Moshe Dayan remembered his threat to raze Qalqilya. His troops drove out all the inhabitants and brought in bulldozers to plough the town under and erase it from the map, just as they had done with the villages of Bayt Nuba, Yalu, and Imwas. Qalqilya's inhabitants were left without shelter, and it was only thanks to direct American intervention that they were allowed to return a month later, after about a third of the town's houses had been destroyed.

By that time, I was gone. I had joined the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1961, and a few years after that, when I was twenty, I joined its military wing, The Heroes of the Return. From that time on, I devoted myself to military work within the Palestinian Revolution in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Tunis.

FAWAZ TURKI

Fawaz Turki was born in Haifa, Palestine, in 1941. He is the author of a number of books, including The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile and Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian-American. He has lectured around the country and has been published extensively in the American media. He has been a writer-in-residence at both SUNY Buffalo and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He currently lives in Washington, D.C.

By the middle of 1968, I had been around for twenty-seven years. And if you want proof that youth is indeed wasted on the young, what I had done with my life up till then is proof enough. For here I was, a Palestinian boy

from the refugee camps, buzzing around the Australian bush, shearing sheep, working with road gangs, and toiling in the iron ore mines in the northwest. Palestine was several time zones away, and its memory was already beginning to fade in my mind, like ash cooling in the grate.

Truth be told, there was more to it than that. When I'd arrived in Australia at age nineteen, I was some sort of a runaway, seeking an alternative order of at-homeness. I wanted to escape my roots. I didn't need my damn roots nagging away at me the whole time or have them daily shoved in my face, as they had been when I was growing up in Beirut. I didn't need others to remind me of my otherness whichever way I turned. In short, I was too young to be Palestinian.

I belonged to a people who had been brought to ruin by a fiercely parochial settler movement feeding on the drug of racialist hatred and aggression that it had brought with it from Europe, a movement that in a relatively short time had put us in desperate flight across our borders, reduced us to being squatters in other peoples' lands, and tried to hound us out of history.

I could not have chosen a better place to flee to. The forbidding landscape of the Australian outback has a way about it—about its searing heat, its unfamiliar rhythms, its influence on the human imagination, its rock and ash and echoes, and the expanse of stars in its night sky—that makes a man jump outside the skin of his past.

But that, I discovered after a while, I could not escape. For it would always come back, that past, as if it were an ache, an ache from a sickness a man didn't know he had. Like the smell of ripened figs at a Perth supermarket that would place me, for one blissful moment, under that big fig tree in the backyard of our house in Haifa. Like the taste of sea salt in my mouth as I swam in the Indian Ocean that would take me back to the Mediterranean, our own ancient sea. Like the apocalyptic images that my mind would dredge up, out of nowhere, of our refugee exodus twenty years before, as we trekked north on the coastal road to Lebanon, where pregnant women gave birth on the wayside, screaming to heaven with labor pain, and where children walked alone, with no hands to hold. Like the memories of my first year at Burj al-Barajneh—a makeshift refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut—when I was always hungry. And cold. And angry. Angry that the tricycle that my dad had bought me a short time before our flight was left behind in Haifa and that some Jewish kid was now riding it around.

These evocations loomed large in my consciousness, where they had taken irrevocable tenure. I could no more escape them than I could my skin. The sheer force of my Palestinian past had seeped into the quick of my very being and had a mastering grip on my identity. There was no escaping that—Australian bush or no Australian bush. As a Palestinian exile, I carried some mighty heavy cargo on my back, and when I was, as it were, driven to unpack it (what is it in, and about, that moment of immediacy in our lives that drives us to do that?), I would feel that anger again, that same anger from twenty years before, welling up in me like vomit.

And here I was in Australia, a Palestinian kid with a name too difficult to pronounce and a patrimony too difficult to locate, talking to myself and waiting for Godot.

No matter. For unlike Beckett's two vagrants, I was destined, as were other Palestinians of my generation, to meet that mythical character. Our massive silence, it turned out, our I-me dialogue, our self-address over the previous two decades, was itself a kind of rhetoric.

In an inexplicable, almost mystical synchronicity, the youth of the world was to mount one hell of an uprising that year, and mount it with the uninhibited, brutal directness of feeling that only youth possesses.

Nineteen Sixty-Eight. There was something magical about it all: Here were these young people, oceans apart, seemingly disconnected by geography, culture, and historical experience, coming together and jelling as one, as if they were all tuned in to the same sounds from the same bell. You know it when the bell tolls for thee.

It happened all over the planet, all at once, all the same year: From the general rebellion in France, known as "*les événements*," that brought down the de Gaulle government, to the antiwar movement in the United States that brought down the Johnson administration; from the Tet offensive in Vietnam to the Cultural Revolution in China; from the Tupamaros in Uruguay to the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland (when Catholics and Protestants marched together for the first time); from the student takeover of Columbia University to the hippie dropout in Haight Ashbury; from the student protests against communist rule in Poland to those similar protests against the Russian invasion in Czechoslovakia; from the Beatles releasing their "Helter Skelter" album to feminists disrupting the Miss America Pageant; from the bloody confrontations in Chicago outside the Democratic Convention headquarters to the "three M formulations" (Marcuse, Marx, and Mao) of the New Left.

That was the year you were afraid to scratch your head in case you missed something. It is no wonder that Jimmy Morrison was singing then, "We want the world, and we want it now."

And we were there too. Part of it all. We the Palestinians were there doing our own thing—in Karameh, in March of that year.

Except for one thing. Everybody else was saying: There is no looking back.

Are you kidding? Our movement was all about looking back. We could not move forward in 1968 without looking back to 1948—looking back anew at what had happened to us during the two decades on either side of that year.

And the looking back began with the question: So the bastards think they have gotten away with it? Hell, no. These people have walked off with our home and homeland, with our movable and immovable property, with our land, our farms, our shops, our public buildings, our paved roads, our cars, our theaters, our clubs, our parks, our furniture, our tricycles. They hounded

us out of our ancestral patrimony and shoved us in refugee camps. They so thoroughly destroyed our villages that nothing was left of them but the wind that now blew through them. And they even robbed us of our name.

Yes, even our name got lost in the shuffle in 1948. Those of us in exile became known as “the Arab refugees.” Those in the West Bank became “Jordanians.” Those few who stayed behind became “Israeli Arabs.” And those in Gaza, well, heck, no one even knew what to call them.

They really thought, with that cozy vulgarity with which they had viewed us, that was going to be that. A bunch of Arabs merging into the Arab world. Soon to vanish into thin air.

We were the people that history was supposed to have forgotten and that God was supposed to have given His back to.

Excuuuuuse me! I guess both needed a bit of a nudge. And we gave them that in 1968.

This was only a short time after the “Israelis,” as they came to call themselves, were able to conquer and occupy that 23-percent remnant of our country, the West Bank/Gaza, that they had left us twenty years before. Now they were astride the whole of historic Palestine and then some, jubilant at their new role as latter day colonial overlords. It was also the time we grabbed them by the throat, as it were, insisting on contract, dialogue, and reason. Sorry, fellows, the accounts between us do not balance. I am a Palestinian from Haifa. You owe me. And you owe me big. You robbed me of my city and my property. You owe me reparations (which I know that you, or your children, will one day have to pay, and under duress if need be) for all the pain and unspeakable suffering you have put me, my family, and my fellow exiles through.

If the Israelis feared us at the time, what they feared was not our military might—we had none—but the resurrection of our name. For once we wrested control of our name and etched it on the conscience of the world, we raised a question that became a deadly threat to Israel’s very legitimacy: If these people are Palestinians, the world wondered, then they came from Palestine, and if they came from Palestine, then why are they not allowed to return there? Logical question, yes? (I remember reading about the innocent editor of some paper in the Midwest cabling his reporter in Beirut, in August 1982, when everybody was wondering where the Palestinians were going to go after their evacuation from the Lebanese capital, and asking him: “Why don’t these people just go back to where they came from?” Why indeed!)

Proclaiming our existence, as Palestinians, as one people, nagged at the Israelis and drove them to suffer gusts of murderous exasperation. That is why Golda Meir at the time was prepared to raise very serious doubts about the professional skills of her optometrist by stating that “there is no such thing as Palestinians.” For so long as we were around, saying our name over and over again, we made them responsible to history. We mocked their claims of turning desert into orchard.

They had not, of course, turned desert into orchard (except for the Negev, there was no goddamn desert in Palestine to turn into orchard in the first place); what they had done rather was to turn our lives into a nightmare of destitution, statelessness, and alienation.

They are the biggest liars in history. And theirs is the biggest crime that any people has committed against another.

They robbed us (I keep using this word because no other will do) of our homeland, superimposed their own state on it, and then proceeded to define what they had created in isolation of its impact on our lives and national destiny. Now they have the *chutzpah* (a word they coined) to celebrate their crime this year, with much fanfare, exactly half a century after the fact.

Look, I'm angry. Still angry after all these years.

Here's one reason.

A while back, on the eve of the Gulf War, I returned to the old country for a visit—yes, these people would allow a Palestinian Arab (with a Western passport) “to visit,” but welcome a Russian Jew “to live,” in Palestine. I went to the house where I was born. The house with the big backyard and the big fig tree. The house where I had left my tricycle behind in 1948. The house where I had made my original leap to consciousness. The house where God had willed me to be born, like all His creatures, to an inviolate freedom. The house I was to grow up and acquire a past in.

I knocked on the door and some low-life immigrant, with an Eastern European accent, opened it, and when he realized who I was, refused me the right even to look around.

Will I ever forgive this man? Just ask yourself if you would had you been a Palestinian.

I will never forgive these people. These people who have (again that word) robbed us, ever so brazenly, of our patrimony and relegated us to a place in the world, unchosen and unwilling, that we have had to inhabit all these last fifty years.

But wait! Our remembrance of where we came from has not torn at the edges. We have not, even after these fifty years, been hounded into oblivion. Palestinian exiles, wherever they are, share that same historical preoccupation, that same turn of phrase, that same communicative internality, that same love for the hammer beat in *al-awda* song that we all grew up singing (“Who am I? / Who are ye? / I am the returnee / I am the returnee”) and that we today hum to our children as we tuck them in every night.

We'll still be around fifty years from now, and if Israel is still around—a doubtful proposition, if you ask me—we'll be knocking on its door, asking to be let in. And if there is no response, we'll break the door down.

We'll break the door down, baby.

If God is my witness, we'll break it down.

My children are not growing up in refugee camps as I have done. They are not living in a host state whose authorities snarl at their heels, or place them close to the door for easy eviction, as their father had lived in Arab host

states. But they do realize that, though they are loyal Americans, only in their ancestral homeland would their larger identity be housed, and only through the struggle to liberate it do they become enduringly defined.

And here we are, after the suffering that followed 1948 and the sacrifices that followed 1968, in 1998. The Palestinian leadership (and I will spare Palestinians the indignity of identifying it as “our leadership”) is bickering with Netanyahu, and all the other yahoos in his government, over the fate of a yard here and a yard there in the West Bank.

West Bank, West Shmank. That ain't got nothing to do with us. Life is too short to be worrying about pretentious trivia like that. We have a new struggle to organize, an old homeland to liberate.

Haidar Abdel Shafi

Haidar Abdel Shafi was born in Gaza, Palestine, in 1919. He received his medical degree from the American University of Beirut in 1943 and is founder and director of the Red Crescent Society in Gaza. A founding member of the Palestine National Council and a member of the first PLO Executive Committee, he headed the Palestinian delegation to the 1991 Madrid Conference and the Palestinian negotiating team in Washington, D.C., from 1991 until 1993. Elected a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council in January 1996, he resigned in October 1997 to protest the council's marginalization. He lives in Gaza.

One often reflects on the past, especially the eventful past. It is difficult to forget the years of the Catastrophe, 1947–50, when Palestinians lost three quarters of their homeland and when half their society was expelled by force and terror to become homeless refugees.

It is difficult to describe the mood of the people in 1947, before all this happened. I could probably describe it as a mood of expectant waiting for the UN deliberations on the future of Palestine. But although the future was loaded with all kinds of dangers, and while the Palestinians were in a state of almost total disarray, one could still sense a mood of naive security. There was nothing to warrant such mood: it could have been due to the sense of belonging to the larger Arab world or to an inability to size up the Zionist threat or clearly appreciate the Arab-Palestinian intrinsic weaknesses.

The United Nations partition resolution of 29 November 1947 triggered violence all over the land, which the Zionist leadership exploited to implement its transfer program. A substantial part of the exodus from southern Palestine poured into the Gaza Strip, tripling the local population which had been about one hundred thousand. This happened over a relatively short period, during the first two or three months of 1948.

I was a member of the Gaza Strip's small medical community, consisting of three doctors and a few nurses, and we organized ourselves to help in times of emergency. One day, when I was on duty, we received news that a

village near Gaza named Breir was under attack by Jewish forces. I immediately got into an ambulance with a male nurse and headed toward the village. Sure enough, we soon began meeting villagers streaming out of Breir on foot or on donkeys, many wounded and beaten. As we approached the village, where smoke and fire was seen on all sides, we stopped as we saw an armored car heading toward us. When it reached us, a Jewish officer demanded through an interpreter: "Where are you going, and what are you up to?" I replied: "As you can see, this is an ambulance. We are a medical team, and we pray you to allow us to get to the village to render needed help." After seeking instructions over his walkie-talkie, the officer said: "The head of the main Jewish settlement in the area wants to talk to you." He nodded to one of his soldiers to get into our ambulance and lead us to the place. They made the ambulance stop at the perimeter of the colony and sent a small car to take me inside. The meeting lasted a few minutes: we would be allowed into Breir only if a team from their side could get into Kfar Darum, a besieged Jewish colony in the Gaza Strip. When I said I could not meet such a request since I had no connection with the Palestinian military command, my request to reach Breir was denied. So we returned home to wait for the wounded who managed to arrive in Gaza on their own.

The influx of refugees posed difficult and complicated logistical problems in terms of shelter, food, health needs, schooling, and so on. The suddenness of the influx made the problems overwhelming. Apart from some outside help provided by a Quaker-led team of international volunteers, it was the determination of the residents that closed the gap. Our small medical community, for example, established a first aid clearing station called the "Emergency Hospital," which functioned for one year. We also established two outpatient clinics providing free medical assistance in the central Strip.

The other part of the story is the attitude of the refugees themselves. In spite of their plight, they acted almost as though nothing had happened. The smile never left their faces, and they did not crumble in the face of their fate. This ability to absorb punishment and deprivation has become a trait of the Palestinians. There is no need to dwell on the many kinds of punishment sustained during occupation, but I remember an encounter that impressed me particularly. I was visiting a family whose home had just been demolished by the Israelis. Members of the family, standing amid the wreckage of their house, received me with smiles and got to scrambling about trying to find me something to sit on. It is difficult or impossible to subdue or annihilate such people, as Israel knows very well by now.

The food problem was resolved by coordination between the Egyptian authority and international organs. The problem of shelter was temporarily solved by accommodation in mosques and school grounds and sharing with relatives and friends.

But what was probably most noticeable was the refugees' ability to adjust. Most of them were of rural society. They had gotten no education or at most an elementary education under the British; what had mattered to them was

working the land and making a living from it. With the sudden loss of their land, they immediately fixed on an alternative: education and knowledge. This new burning desire was met by a coordinated effort between the new UN agency UNRWA and the Egyptian government. It soon became a common spectacle to see young boys and girls promenading on side roads with copybooks in hand memorizing some school assignment. Often one saw them bent over solving an equation on the road for lack of paper.

In their high school studies, they did better than average. The Egyptian government rewarded their drive to learn by accepting eligible high school graduates in Egyptian universities free of charge. Soon there were scores of Palestinian university graduates in the sciences and humanities who found work opportunities in neighboring Arab states, making a decent living and enough to support their families in their places of refuge. In so doing they thwarted the attempts by Israel and others to erase the Palestinian identity. Soon they started agitating for a role in defending their political rights, which resulted in the establishment of the PLO in May 1964.

These reflections are cause for reassurance in the face of the prevailing apathy and frustration among Palestinians in the occupied territories and the diaspora. Our future will be determined by how much we are able to put the Palestinian house in order and meet the legitimate needs of the Palestinian individual. There can be no excuse for failing to do this—at least not in the case of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The fact that we have been given the chance to have an elected authority means that we have no valid justification not to work for democratic change that can transform the outlook from frustration to hope. I repeat and affirm the importance of attending to the legitimate needs of the individual, as the individual is the crucial factor that determines the future. Given the seriousness of our predicament, the priority is to achieve a vibrant steadfastness on our national soil.

We should establish a model of democracy that affirms the supremacy of law, freedom of speech and the press, freedom of association, accountability and transparency in government, and an independent judiciary. If such a regime were introduced in the occupied territories, then we could deal effectively with the problems and needs of the diaspora. This would also start the countdown for reaching our national objectives.

INEA BUSHNAQ

Inea Bushnaq was born in West Jerusalem, Palestine, in 1938. A free-lance translator and writer, she is the author of Arab Folk Tales (Pantheon, 1986). She lives in New York City.

Not so long ago, at a railroad crossing in Vermont, I watched a freight train pass: boxcar after boxcar with names like LACKAWANNA, BOSTON & MAINE, SANTA FE, the sound of the words neatly echoing the rattle of the

wheels. It left me with a vague sense of deprivation. I have lived in this country longer than anywhere else, yet those very American-sounding, evocative names hold no resonance for me, they are simply words. But say some essentially Palestinian words like *hindbeh* or *khubbeizeh* and *'akkoub* and *shomar*, and I can tell you how these wild greens taste, both cooked and raw, and show you where among the pale rocks of Dayr al-Ghusun or Asira they grow and how, after a spring rain, you can smell the untamed red earth which gives them their distinct character. And by now the years I have spent in Palestine are a meager fraction of my life.

In 1948 we were small children, so the anxious, panting breath of the adults, as we crawled on all fours to the safety of the windowless stairwell, was more significant to us than the sound of bullets slamming into the wooden shutters. Indeed, everything changed after that night, our last in our Lower Bak'a home on the Bayt Safafa road. Weeks earlier, during a picnic in the village of Battir, a loud muffled thud had stopped everyone eating and chatting for a moment, and then a puff of black dust hung in the air when we looked toward Jerusalem. We may have heard the words "King David Hotel" in the days following, but that was a whole world away from our round of lessons and play. Now, within hours, we found ourselves in Nablus at the house of an uncle where some of the other relatives were also staying, having left Haifa and the coast for the greater security of the inland city.

In ordinary times, the gathering of so many family members used to mark the *'Id* and other feasts—the best days of our year. Soon all our days became crowded as a festival. Various grown-ups seemed to be permanently parked on one of the verandas, smoking and talking. Cousins, uncles, aunts were constantly coming or going. There was fuss and clatter as extra settings were added to the dinner table for unexpected arrivals. The atmosphere of excitement and upheaval permitted the children more freedom than we had known before—as long as we made ourselves scarce during radio newscasts.

We played at housekeeping, *bayt buyut*, in an ancient burial cave cut into the hillside below the house. It had been used as a stable, but we cleaned out the dirt and with worn-out *hasiras* (mats) we furnished the niches where bodies had once lain. When Zionist air raids began over Nablus, we saw with satisfaction the whole *hara*, or neighborhood, rush to "our" cave at the howl of the siren; like a real party despite the lingering smell of sheep.

Forty years later, traveling in the West Bank during the intifada, I felt again the heady intimacy and cheerful closing of ranks under pressure. I was the adult now who knew the odds too well and tossed sleepless as gunshots and searchlights shattered the night. And another generation of children harvested bullets by the bucket from the daytime gardens, could name their varieties as if they were marbles, and incorporated them into their games.

Those final months in Palestine, in Nablus, shone bright in remembrance, being the prelude to the dispersal of the extended family through the neighboring Arab countries and our own removal a thousand miles away to London for almost a decade. Even at this distance, the warmth remains of

that untidy time, full of events, living pell-mell in luxurious closeness with so many of those who were most dear. As others regretted stolen houses, fields or orange trees, I had my own childish catalog of lost sounds, smells, and affections. To these I clung as to a talisman during the years we lived in England. Whenever I noticed the difference between me and those around me, I could remind myself that somewhere I too belonged.

Air travel was costly in the 1950s, long distance phone calls a luxury, and the only contact with relatives the rare flimsy airmail letter or, in emergency, a telegram. One could well begin to wonder whether Palestine existed at all outside the occasional recurring dream. After all, we ourselves had in the meantime become Jordanian citizens with passports to show for it. And more and more, when I was asked, "Where do you come from?" and I said "Palestine," the response would be, "So you speak Hebrew!"

But when at last we did return, our anticipation built up with time and longing, Palestine, the West Bank now, proved more vivid even than our rosier memories—the blue of the sky; the tenderness of the blood relatives; the intense taste of *baladi*, local, fruits; the clear-cut beauty of the bare stony hills. In this reclaimed familiar setting, which surpassed expectations, it was disconcerting, if inevitable, to make the discovery that somehow I myself no longer fit in as comfortably as I had remembered. Here too I was different.

One of the amusements of the boys of my childhood was to tie a flying beetle to a long thread, watch it circle in the air then reel it in at will. Similarly when *al-bilad bitnadi*, when the homeland calls to her children, one feels that tug which says "*sharriq*" or "Go East!" Since emigrating to the United States in 1967, where three family members had preceded me, the number of households in the States belonging to immediate relatives has grown sevenfold. Still, Jerusalem, however diminished and depleted, remains the lodestar and my shuttles between here and there grow more and more frequent. Only recently has landing at JFK felt like "coming home" as opposed to "arriving in New York." The lights of Manhattan seen from above dazzle the eye. But approaching the rocky landscape of my first home from the air and the sight of a flock of goats moving with their shadow like so many fleas across the land makes the heart beat faster.

Curiously, the nearest I have felt to the Palestine I missed has been when I have traveled as an outsider collecting traditional stories and oral histories. Unconstrained by convention and familial imperatives, I have been at liberty to immerse myself in the olive-growing country of the West Bank. In bumpy "service" taxis I have eavesdropped on rural gossip. I have met illiterate folk poets who could place words in rhyming lines as deftly as they set rows of stones in terrace walls. I have heard about the years of the locusts and the great frost at the turn of the century which broke the branches of the olive trees but taught the fellahin the benefit of pruning. I have picked wild thyme, *za'tar*.

As if the loss of Palestine were my chief bequest, I have watched my American-born daughter follow in some of my long ago footsteps. She has

trotted to the *furun*, the communal bake house, with a trayload of risen dough balanced on her head. She has developed a taste for green almonds with salt and fresh chickpeas roasted on the vine. And, finally, she has said to me on Hudson Street, New York, “Stop! Doesn’t that smell make you think for a second that you are in Ramallah?”

Ostensibly, the story is over: hands have been shaken and the world has applauded a happy ending which promised peace and autonomy. During this year’s visit, I sit in the *service* that will take me to Nablus. The taxi driver is good-humoredly wiping his windows clean. I have told him I have come all the way from America, and I want to see the green onion fields of Sinjil and the hills of almond blossom. A young man sitting in front of me leans back and says, “*Khalto* [my Aunt], won’t you adopt me as your son, so I can leave this place and go where I can find a decent life?”

YEZID SAYIGH

Yezid Sayigh was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1955 but moved to Beirut when he was one year old. He teaches international politics at University of Cambridge, where he is assistant director of studies at the Centre of International Studies. He is the author of Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

For an instant, before I have time to reflect, 1948 is encapsulated for me in two photographs I have in my study. One, in black and white, is an outside shot of my paternal grandparents posing with their seven children in Tiberias in the early 1940s. The other, this time in color, was taken by my mother during a visit in 1980 and shows the front of the family house with its triple-arched *liwan* and the black volcanic stone construction typical of the area. Neither photograph hints at the conflict that engulfed family and house; only my knowledge links them. Yet they reveal to me the way in which my images and imaginings—of life in Palestine in the Mandate years, of the individual stories of my father and his parents and siblings, and of the collective uprootings of 1947-49—are telescoped into what has always seemed to me like a single event, depriving me of the detail and texture of a much richer fabric.

As I think further, other photographs come to mind, now-famous ones of the exodus reproduced by UNRWA: a grieving, aged refugee woman, and rows of pointed, dark tents with flimsy wattle fences in a plain overlooked by snow-capped mountains. Why is it that the most graphic images are those in black and white? Is it because they preserve something I know to be specifically Palestinian, with a single shot evoking an entire era, whereas color merges diverse but all-too-similar tragedies from around the world, to the point of routinizing and banalizing them? Or is it that black and white represents something before my time and therefore something that I can recast

and reinvent, a contest of narratives that I can wage and even win? For if there is one thing that I come away with from thinking about 1948, it is the need to deconstruct it and subject its distinct strands to separate analysis before reintegrating them into a dynamic narrative that is whole but multifaceted and multilayered and therefore both contractible and expandable.

Such deconstruction and reintegration involves three analytical distinctions. The first distinguishes between the structured social, economic, political, and cultural discourses and practices of Palestinian society as they evolved in the late Ottoman and Mandate periods, as they were transformed during the intense and sweeping dislocations of 1947–49, and as they adapted to post-Nakba realities. I cannot conceive of understanding 1948, nor its meaning for Palestinians today, unless it is bound internally to what went before and what came after; viewing it exclusively as the result of Zionist invasion, British conspiracy, and expropriation of Palestinian decision making by Arab states and statically as fixed in time and space fails entirely to satisfy me.

The second analytical distinction to be made is between the all-embracing nature of 1948—that did so much to create a unifying ethos and demarcate the Arabs of Mandate Palestine from those of what in the meantime had become Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan—and the myriad responses to the unfolding events of 1947–49 and equally myriad adaptations to their aftermath, which were influenced in varying degrees and combinations by background markers—class and religious affiliation, rural-versus-urban origin and regional location, material relation to land and clan, and modern-versus-traditional education and employment—as well as by external agency. In contrast to the homogenizing myth of modern Palestinian nationalism, not all Palestinians fared or responded the same, even when they shared a commonality in al-Nakba, and this moreover has everything to do with our understanding of the subsequent evolution of Palestinian national identity and of its political institutions and strategic choices.

The question of identity, and what I make of it, recurs in the third analytical distinction, between my personal and political responses to 1948. Sifting through my feelings and thoughts, I am struck by the correlation between the failure of the “people’s war” credo, the corruption of internal PLO relations, and finally the Sabra-Shatila massacre and the way in which my understanding of, and relation to, 1948 has shifted over time. This, of course, was not a simple progression. It was partly the product of necessity: how to come to terms with, while contesting where necessary, the reality of what Israel is and what Israel does. But it arose also from a growing conviction that for Palestinians to be asserted as “real” people with political and civil entitlements required them no longer to be reducible to victims; the intifada embodied this self-empowering ethos at a practical level of confrontation, as, I believe, did the pursuit of a negotiated settlement and historic reconciliation with Israel. This means two things for me. In order both to have a history and to free it (from self-interested narration or ideological homogenization, by

Self or Other), Palestinians must see themselves as agents in their own history, secure in the knowledge that it is possible to evaluate critically the role of various Palestinian individuals, groups, and strata and to acknowledge their contribution to undesirable historical outcomes without absolving others of moral and legal responsibility for their own acts.

The second issue here is how I have come to redefine myself, and Palestinian identity more generally, in ways that allow me to relate and reconcile my emotional and intellectual responses to the reality of Israel as a collective and of Israelis as individual human beings. In other words, it is no more possible now to think historically about 1948 without integrating the prestate yishuv and Israel into the account, than it is to write the history of the latter two entities without acknowledging the integral place of the Palestinians.

To reiterate and develop my theme, 1948 is of course more than a series of historical events that took place in 1947–49 and that had specific, calculable material results. Were that the case, the Palestinian struggle would have been reducible to a legal and “technical political” dispute over repatriation and compensation, which it never was. Rather, it is precisely because for Palestinians 1948 is also about the content, form, and meaning of national identity as practiced in different symbolic and existential contexts—therefore involving variations, adaptations, and compromises—that we must cease to think of it as a single “event,” from which we derive in unilinear fashion assumptions about who Palestinians are, how they came to be, and how they will behave. Much as it may go against the grain, the Palestinian metanarrative is provided, in common with other former Ottoman and former colonial peoples, by the construction in the modern period of national identities and particularistic, territorial states rather than by 1948, which, though indubitably a major landmark and turning point in that historic process and involving immense human suffering and collective trauma, was nonetheless just that: a landmark and a turning point.

I am very aware, as I write, of the degree to which I have intellectualized 1948, but this is as reflective of my effort to account for the way in which Palestinian history has unfolded since then (as well as my own history since becoming “political” in the wake of the 1967 war) as it is of any emotional or existential distance on my part. Indeed, it is no coincidence that I took the last few steps away from the self-justifying and self-perpetuating nationalism institutionalized in the PLO (but subscribed to by many of the PLO leadership’s opponents and critics) as a direct result of my experience as a Palestinian negotiator in 1991–94. The manipulation of nationalist politics in that period was hardly surprising to me, having experienced and vocally criticized it since joining the national movement at the end of the 1960s, but what was new was my recognition that manipulation necessarily extended to any and all others involved in producing nationalist narratives, and therefore that any and all areas and eras of Palestinian history required an equally sharp and critical reappraisal.

I moreover strongly suspect that, although my own image of 1948 has been softened from the outset by my middle-class upbringing and exposure to cosmopolitan lifestyles and universalistic, liberal beliefs, Palestinians similarly born after 1948 who have had to contend with a much harsher aftermath in refugee camps or under Israeli occupation must nonetheless share with me at least a telescoped, compressed, and relativized perspective of 1948. Not that it is not hugely important to them, but simply that their emotional and perceptual stance cannot but be shaped both by their generational distance and by the immediacy of the socioeconomic settings and politicoadministrative contexts in which they live. Reviewing the way in which 1948 has been narrated to date and how it has been related to subsequent institutional discourses and practices—by Palestinians—I am struck by the tyranny of the (male-, class-, and institution-dominated) nationalist narrative, and in particular by the narcissism of intellectuals who in the past claimed to speak for what Western social science now calls “subalterns” (“donkeys of the earth” in their own self-description), simplifying and homogenizing their experiences and obscuring the fact that they, too, have varied and layered memories, feelings, and even readings of 1948. All along it has been possible to be critical of the role of this class or that leader, yet too often this again uses a levelling, nationalist measure that in the last resort suppresses other claims to 1948 and to what did, and should have, happened.

It seems to me, in closing, that the Palestinians face a distinct challenge: to sift (but not sever) how they feel about 1948 from the practical and political choices they will make in their own lives and lifetime. When I return in my mind to the family house in Tiberias, I wonder what life might have been like had I, as the eldest son of the eldest son, been born there, but conclude that I might in all probability have been displaced and diverted by other, unforeseen if more peaceable, migrations and processes that occur throughout human society and history. That I was unjustly and forcibly deprived of this birthright is undeniable, but at a personal level I like to derive black humor from the fact that the family house has since been turned into what is reputedly the best Chinese restaurant in Tiberias. Achieving a reasonable, and reasonably just, settlement of the conflict is of course crucially important politically, and here it appears to me that an inescapable logic encloses both sides, whatever the historical and legal arguments: to answer the question of who one is, is to decide not only who the other is but also what is to be done to them. Israelis may still not be ready to come to terms with what they have done to Palestinians so far, and so continue to debate what makes an Israeli/Jew/Zionist, but no more can the Palestinians determine their own future without coming to terms with the Israeli collectivity at every level. Nor can they come to terms with themselves without a critical reinterpretation of self—involving both deconstruction and recontextualization of historically grounded processes and, consequently, redefinition of the “origins” and constructions of identity—and of other dimensions of their identity—Arab,

Islamic, Jordanian, local, and so on. Hence the necessity of rethinking, decoupling, and reclaiming 1948.

SHAFIQ AL-HOUT

Shafiq al-Hout was born in Jaffa, Palestine, in 1932. He was head of the PLO Beirut Office from 1966 to 1993. On a number of occasions he served as spokesman of the PLO delegation to the UN General Assembly sessions and frequently represented the PLO on international missions. A member of the first Palestine National Congress in 1964, he resigned from the PLO Executive Committee after the Oslo agreement and has since been a prominent member of the Palestinian opposition. He lives in Beirut.

It is difficult for a Palestinian to specify the time of his involvement in the national movement of his people other than his date of birth. Because anyone born in Palestine before the Catastrophe—or even afterward, in exile—had no choice but to feel the Palestine problem early on. I am from Jaffa, and my fate is to have been uprooted from my city on 24 April 1948 and to spend the rest of my life as a militant fighting for my right to return there as a free citizen.

I used to stand on the seashore near my house and look southward to the ancient lighthouse and harbor of Jaffa's Old City, with its remnants of fortresses and ancient city walls, its monasteries and mosques and covered markets, each with its own story bearing witness to the time when it was built. And then I would turn northward to see the modest new wooden houses of the Jewish immigrants on the hill. Over the years those wooden structures gradually became stone as they were absorbed into Tel Aviv, which was established in 1909. Looking south and north, the difference was about a thousand years of history, and that is the difference between the two cities.

My first awareness of the Palestine problem came during the summer of 1938—it was during the Great Rebellion—when my family was awakened at dawn by violent knocking at the door. British soldiers accompanied by a young Jewish woman pushed in and ordered my father and older brothers to a nearby square along with other men of the neighborhood. I was six at the time, and one of the soldiers gestured to me with his bayonet to sit in a corner. My eyes were glued to my mother, who was physically resisting the Jewish woman's attempts to search her with excuses about having just performed her ablutions. The soldiers turned the house upside down, ripping open mattresses, mixing oil and rice and flour, and even making off with some money they found and some of my mother's wedding souvenirs.

My father and brothers were released at nightfall, and I still remember the signs of humiliation and suffering on their faces after the long hours under the scorching summer sun. My mother welcomed them by thanking God for their safe return and for "making the eyes of the soldiers blind so they didn't find anything." My father asked what there had been for the soldiers to find,

and my mother took from her bosom a strange object. Somebody said “grenade” and my father turned white with rage, looking at my two brothers. They both denied any knowledge of it, but I knew it had something to do with Jamal, the younger one, who was twelve at the time, and I noticed him quietly weeping that night when my father used the darkness to take the thing out and throw it far from our house.

After that, I knew we were in danger and had enemies and that people were resisting them and that one of those people was my brother Jamal. Since that day the circle of my curiosity grew wider, and I began to listen to the radio and ask about what I didn’t understand.

I finished primary school in 1944 and entered the ‘Amiriyya secondary school, one of the best in Palestine. The ‘Amiriyya was also known for its nationalist activism, so there were always strikes and meetings and demonstrations. Instead of normal schoolboy conversation, as time went on talk of what could be done overshadowed all else. In 1948, I was in my final year, and because of the political uncertainties we had to sit for our matriculation exams, on which our entire academic future depended, in April instead of June. The fourteenth of April is a day that is burned in my memory, because that was the day I was forced to take the Arabic examination in the École des Frères when a tremendous funeral procession was taking place for one of the martyrs of the resistance. It was my brother Jamal, who after leading numerous commando raids against nearby settlements had been killed in an ambush.

Just ten days later, on 24 April, the family crowded onto the deck of the Greek ship *Dolores*, which set sail for Beirut at sunset. And I remember watching Jaffa disappear from sight until there was nothing but water all around. It never occurred to me that I would never see it again.

Before the conquest of Palestine, I had been matter-of-fact about my city, but since that time Jaffa has filled my memory and my mind. Sometimes I amuse myself by retracing the route I took a thousand times between my house on al-‘Alim Street in the Manshiyya quarter and my school, conjuring up every detail. Our street was too narrow for anything but carts to pass, so I would walk west to the Hasan Bek Mosque overlooking the sea to catch Bus Number 2, heading south from its last stop on the outskirts of Tel Aviv and on to Jaffa’s heart. I can name every stop along the way, from the first on al-Hamra Hill dominated by the Baydas mansion and along to the Manshiyya police station, where the short self-important Officer ‘Abdallah, the butt of many of our slogans shouted during demonstrations, would strut proudly in the company of British soldiers. The bus then traveled along al-Mahatta and to the elegant Iskandar ‘Awad Street that led into Clock Tower Square, the most ancient of Jaffa, and past the brooding prison fortress of Kishleh. Beyond the harbor area, you had to pay another piaster as the bus entered a new zone, heading left to enter the Suq al-Salahi, where the orange traders congregated, these traders who knew every grove in Palestine and the exact characteristics of the oranges each produced. We then went past the vegeta-

ble market, and finally to Municipality Square with its gardens and trees, where we got down and continued to school on foot.

On our way home, we'd walk along King George Street, passing by the al-Bassah football field where the matches between the various Palestinian teams and clubs, including the Islamic Club and the Greek Orthodox Club, were held. Across the street was the Continental Hotel, where writers and poets used to congregate after the British-sponsored Near East Radio Service in Arabic moved its broadcasting headquarters to Jaffa. On the hotel terrace, we would recognize many well-known Palestinian and Arab writers and artists, especially Egyptians, such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab, and Yusif Wahbi. Jaffa was also the undisputed press capital of Palestine, publishing newspapers such as *al-Difa'*, *Filastin*, *al-Strat al-Mustaqim*, *al-Sha'b*, and *al-Wihdah*, considered among the vanguard of Arab newspapers of the time, second only to Egypt's.

Almost every place along the route carried memories of the nationalist struggle—the great demonstrations at Clock Tower Square fed by masses of worshippers pouring out of the Great Mosque after Friday prayers, the ruins of the Grand Serai that the Zionist gangs blew up after the UN partition resolution and where some of Jaffa's best young men were martyred, the public meetings at the al-Hamra Cinema, one of the most luxurious of the Middle East, and the demonstrations that followed in the nearby Municipal Square. Near the harbor was the Muslim Youth Club, which played an important role trying to organize resistance in 1948 and a number of whose members were martyred. Other members had joined Qawuqji's Arab Salvation Army, and some of these eventually joined the Palestine Liberation Army after the establishment of the PLO.

The sea was turbulent when we left that April evening of 1948. There was a high wind and the waves were violent, and I remember worrying about what was happening to all the small boats loaded with other refugees making their way to Lebanon and to Gaza and on to the ports of Egypt—in fact, scores were drowned. Of course I didn't think in terms of "refugees" at the time. The word "refugee" didn't enter the Palestinian and Arab lexicon until later—a few hours later, actually, when the first boatloads of the sons of Palestine arrived in ports that were not theirs, and they found themselves strangers, even among brothers and Arabs.

Years later, in the summer of 1969, when thousands of young men were thronging to join the fedayin after the Battle of Karameh the previous March, I was accompanying a French television crew that was doing a story on the new resistance movement that was emerging. I took them to the Khaw camp in Jordan, and one of the journalists unexpectedly asked an old woman, the mother of one of the fedayin, why she had left her country in 1948. Without hesitating, she shot back: "Because we were stupid." I tried to fudge the translation but she wouldn't let me get away with it, looking at me sharply and saying: "Translate what I told you! Tell him that we were stupid." I did as she bid me. But I started turning over in my mind what the old woman had

said, and the day we left Jaffa swirled before my eyes. Yes, I decided. In a way she had been right, and everything that followed—the statelessness, the terrible misery of the camps, the conflicts, the exile—confirms that those of us who were not physically expelled should not have budged, that we would have been better off taking our chances and staying put.

But on the other hand, how could we have known at the time what lay in store? We didn't have information about the real situation except what we read in the papers and heard on the radio. We were up against the terrorism of the two Zionist organizations, and as for our own leadership, we didn't realize at the time that we didn't have one. In Jaffa, there was the National Committee, a group of well-intentioned men but with limited means organizationally, politically, and militarily. It was the people who took the initiative, but without any guidance. Many used their savings to buy arms, a rifle or revolver, to guard the parts of the city facing Tel Aviv. The young men would move from front to front according to the rumors about the intentions of the enemy. As the shelling intensified people began leaving the neighborhoods closest to the Jewish areas to seek refuge in the Old City, returning back in keeping with the rumors and the mortar fire. The enemy knew how to take advantage of the confusion and launch their psychological warfare, and what with the indiscriminate shelling and fears of another Dayr Yasin, people began to flee, thinking they had only two options: to stay and risk being killed, or to leave and hope that the Arab armies would implement the secret resolutions taken at the Arab League meetings in Bludan, Anshas, and 'Aley.

My family settled in Beirut, and that fall I enrolled in the American University of Beirut (AUB). It was a time of great political ferment. The Arab Nationalist Movement of George Habash, Wadi' Haddad, Hani al-Hindi, and Ahmad al-Khatib was taking off. Other students were involved in the Ba'th, the Parti Populaire Syrien, and the Organization of Communist Students. The Palestine question was at the top of the agenda. With a number of comrades who couldn't afford to go to AUB, I was very involved in a clandestine group we established called the "Congress of the Dispersed Palestinians," and we started mobilizing people in the camps—which were still tents at the time. But Lebanese Security, with the complicity of Hajj Amin al-Husayni's Arab Higher Committee, accused us of being communist. In the middle of the academic year 1950–51, I was imprisoned along with some of my comrades and suspended from school for a year. When I was released for want of sufficient evidence to convict me and I tried to resume my studies, I was surprised by a presidential decree expelling me from Lebanon. So I was arrested again and sentenced to three months in prison after which the expulsion was to be carried out.

After I got out of prison, some relatives managed through contacts with the prime minister, Sami al-Sulh, to get the expulsion order frozen, but it remained like a Sword of Damocles over my head until 1955 when my family recovered their Lebanese nationality. In the meantime I had graduated from AUB and for the next few years taught school in Lebanon and then

Kuwait. But the teaching profession didn't fulfill my national aspirations, and in 1958 I began working as a journalist for *al-Hawadess*, a Lebanese magazine that had just started.

At the same time I continued my political work, and by the beginning of the 1960s I had established the first cell of a secret organization known as the Palestinian Liberation Front. The organization, which soon included Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, various Arab countries, and North America, played a significant role in the establishment of the PLO. At the time the PLO was founded in 1964, most of the Palestinian organizations were opposed to it, but because we believed in national unity, we dissolved our own organization and placed ourselves under the new structure. From then on, I worked full time for the PLO, until I resigned to protest the signing of Oslo and to pursue the struggle in the opposition.

So I have spent forty years of my life as a full-time militant in the Palestinian movement, and I hope to spend the rest of my life on the same road. From the time I left Jaffa, I have not been able to separate what is called private from what is called public life, to distinguish between myself and the cause. And if any Palestinian tries to do so he will find others who will remind him that he cannot, no matter how hard he tries.

SALMA KHADRA JAYYUSI

Salma Khadra Jayyusi, a poet and scholar, was born in Salt, Transjordan, in 1928. She is founder and director of PROTA (Project of Translation from Arabic) and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is author of the two-volume critical history Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry and editor of Modern Arabic Fiction: An Anthology, Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology, and An Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature, all published by Columbia University Press.

After it had all happened, after the Palestinians were ousted from their homes, after the Arab armies retreated in shame, still we could see no clear way through. The Palestinians were immediately faced not simply with the national tragedy, but with the daily need for survival. The problem of securing food and shelter, of getting through a single day, became so paramount that, at the time, it submerged the political implications of the Catastrophe, horrific though they were. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands were scattered in the world, with no money, no place to live, no future.

I was in Amman with my husband when the Catastrophe struck. My own family had moved to Syria earlier on when my father was appointed the Palestinian member of the four-member Arab Military Committee based in Damascus, whose responsibility was to secure weapons for the Palestinian fighters. This was how my father's library was saved. But the library of the historian 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, married to my aunt, was completely gone. On his Jerusalem desk he left six historical manuscripts, confident, as thousands of

others were, that it was only a temporary move. All would be in place again, and Palestine would be secure with the imminent arrival of the Arab armies.

The most telling feature of the 1948 debacle was the way people failed fully to apprehend its implications. Everything happened so quickly that no one believed the loss to be definitive. You cannot believe the unbelievable with ease.

The first Arab house in the Galilee to be vindictively blown up by the Zionist forces in the spring of 1948 was my father's newly built house on top of Mount Biryā near his hometown, Safad. The mountain, with the lands belonging to the village of Biryā, had been appropriated by the Zionists through one of their many legalistic maneuvers. But father, who had studied law as an adult for the sole purpose of protecting Palestinian lands against such maneuvers, fought and won the case for the villagers, then bought a piece of land on top of the mountain and built a summer house there just one year before the debacle. Through well-fought legal cases, for which he had spent untold hours researching old archives in Acre's Jazzar Mosque and elsewhere, he won back for the Arabs several other places: the Mirun village in Northern Galilee, the Manshiyya stretches of land outside Acre, the village of Balad al-Shaykh near Haifa and its surrounding lands, and others, merely to see them fall, in 1948, into the hands of the Zionists. My mother heard of the demolition of the house a few days before she left to join my father in Damascus. When she told him about it, he was silent for a minute or so, then said, "We'll take it back soon, and we'll rebuild the house."

During the few months following the debacle, it was moving to see the persistence of hope and the vision of imminent return. My youngest sister, Bouran, came to our mother one day, looking elated. "I've just heard of a prophecy, Mother," she said. "It is written that the Jews will take Palestine for a time of seven spans. It must mean seven months now!" When she had gone, Mother said, "So we're relying on oracles and divinations now! I didn't want to stifle her hopes." After the seven months had passed, Bouran started speaking of seven years. And then she began to say, with bitter irony, "Now we'll have to wait seventy years!"

Almost all the Khadra family members who were part of the massive flight from Safad converged on Damascus. My parents' house, spacious enough and ready for guests, served as shelter for a number of our relatives until they found a more permanent place. I had gone to Damascus to help Mother with the situation. One morning, during the very early part of the exodus, I answered the door to find my cousin 'Izziddin holding about twenty of the finest freshwater fish on a hook. "From Lake Tiberias," he said with a broad smile—for the last time ever a treasure from the lake. And I remembered his wedding to the beautiful Ni'mat in Safad, when my cousin Basima and I, two mischievous little girls of eight and six, were so fascinated by the rituals that we dared approach the marriage chamber after everyone else had retreated to leave the newlyweds to their privacy. Basima, two years older and the more audacious, had tried to eavesdrop, crawling to the door of the chamber

and then coming back, stifling her giggles, with nothing coherent to report. But this world had now given way to a new world of alienation and loss.

One day in the aftermath of the exodus, during that same visit to my parents, I went to one of the school buildings sheltering the refugees to look for more relatives and discovered three families of cousins. I found my cousin Mu'alla, who had been the neatest and most elegant young woman I knew, sitting on a low stool, with bedding, bags of vegetables, and bundles of clothes strewn all around, frying sliced eggplants over a noisy primus on the floor. "Mu'alla!" I exclaimed, trying to hold back my tears. "How are things? Can I help?" She looked at me with bleary eyes. "Yes, Salma, you can. Do you hear my baby crying? Nurse her for me, cousin, please. I have to cook. Najeeb has asked some guests for lunch!" Guests in this ordeal? But I gave no expression to my thoughts.

However, I could not bring myself to nurse her little girl, to give her my own baby's milk. I said, "You go and nurse her. I'll fry your eggplants."

This situation separating me from my own people—they refugees, I a Jordanian citizen with nothing in my life outwardly changed—caused me great torment. It lies behind my long poem "Uprooted" about the feelings of estrangement on the part of the refugees toward those who did not suffer the experience of being uprooted. It would be much later that the feeling of deracination, of not belonging, would come to haunt me, as time accentuated my long absence from my country and nostalgia began to gnaw at my heart for the land of my childhood and youth. After Palestine, I lived on four continents and in many cities, but with no anchor in my country I had no center of gravity, always feeling myself a stranger at heart.

With the dispersal, no one knew what had happened to their friends and acquaintances. Still not far from school days, I started asking about my old classmates, my friends, and their families. One day when I was on a bus in Damascus, I saw Dahoudiyya, an old classmate of mine at Schmidt's Girls College, who came from one of Jerusalem's biggest and most affluent families, walking in the Salhiyya center. She was wearing an untidy black scarf, a look of abandonment on her face, carrying a child on one arm and dragging another miserable-looking little girl by the hand. I jumped off at the next stop and ran back, looking for her. She had disappeared. That image was to haunt me all my life.

But I have another image, a happier one, of resourcefulness under adversity. Yusra Hamou, the daughter of my father's former secretary in Acre, a beautiful and aristocratic-looking young woman, refused to remain a poor and bitter refugee. Her husband had been a teacher in Palestine, but so soon after the influx of such numbers of refugees he could not find work in Damascus. With her large family living on the meager refugee allowance, she decided to do something to change their lot, and there followed a story from the pages of the Arabian Nights. From a Damascene neighbor with whom she had forged a friendship she borrowed a stylish dress; from my mother she borrowed a handbag, some makeup, and perfume. She then made the

rounds of my mother's friends until she was impeccably attired, including an expensive fur jacket. Borrowing taxi money from my mother, she went straight to the presidential mansion on the official day the president's wife received guests without appointments; arriving in such elegance, the porters could not bar her entrance. With her charm and wit, she endeared herself to the president's wife and was able to obtain an audience with President Quwwatli himself. As a result, not only were packages of food and clothing from the presidency delivered to the family, but her husband was invited for an interview at the Ministry of Education and was offered a teaching post.

1948, more than 1967, proved to be a major social catalyst. Palestinians in adversity had to associate in new ways. People slipped, unobtrusively, from their old social positions, without feeling it at the beginning. Some of the old families who had formed a class by themselves, had intermarried among themselves, and had their own traditions built on money and status, were now struggling to exist with dignity.

Meanwhile, in the early fifties, when the newly rich Gulf oil countries began seeking help to set up schools, government offices, and modern civil systems, the Palestinians were among the first to answer the call. The first to go were those more accustomed to hardship, as life in the Gulf was an inferno then, with no amenities to lessen the severity of heat and that fine dust blown in by frequent sandstorms that clung to one's eyelids like glue. And while those who could not brave a harsh desert life grew poorer and poorer, these men became rich. Within less than ten years, a new rank of Palestinians appeared, arriving in chauffeur-driven cars from the Gulf to spend summers in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. With time, many Palestinians from all ranks of society would learn the ways of the financial world, and, through labor and intelligence, would acquire wealth and status. A select group among them would place part of their wealth in the service of their country.

During the first years after the debacle, ties between Palestinians in the diaspora and those who had remained on the soil of their country were severed, apart from the radio correspondence sending greetings on the air and major news of death, birth, and marriage, and apart from the truncated and restricted family reunions at the Jordanian-Israeli border. We did not know what the "inside" writers and poets were creating, so that the first discovery, in the 1960s, of Samih al-Qasim, Tawfiq Zayyad, Mahmoud Darwish, and others, still at the beginning of their poetic careers, was a revelation. The challenge in their voices, the verve and the determination to fight, to look hard into the face of the enemy, was not only an inspiration but a reassurance that Palestine and its spirit were not dead.

And Palestine proceeded to tell its story to the world, over and over again, in poetry and fiction; in books of history, of political analysis, of social critique; in personal testimonies of great variety—autobiographies, memoirs, reminiscences, letters, and diaries; in all kinds of writing. Nothing in Palestine's story will disappear. It is an unending narrative.

And so is the narrative I am striving to relate—episodes of Palestinian life that are unending. My cousin ‘Izziddin and his wife Ni‘mat were destined to spend the rest of their lives in Damascus, and so were my cousin Mu‘alla and her husband Najeeb. The two men died before their wives, leaving a large number of children and grandchildren behind. My cousin Basima, now a handsome and stately grandmother with a progeny of over forty, has spent her life in Irbid, Jordan. I have spent my life all over the world. My immediate family is scattered over three continents. Yet my three children feel genuinely Palestinian. Of their children, Nassir and Ruanne, the youngest, have grown up on Palestinian soil and have witnessed first-hand the ever-accelerating methods of aggression Israel is visiting upon their people. They speak with deep anger. Jinan, half English, has grown up in America. She now speaks the Palestinian vernacular, and because she feels great sorrow over the Holocaust, is still more incensed at Israeli atrocities. Omar, just seventeen, grew up in London. When he was twelve, he started asking about his roots and began reading assiduously about the history of his people and now wants to specialize in it. He too speaks with deep anger.

Shireen, no longer a child, has also grown up in London, spending her adolescence with books and British friends, rarely speaking of politics. I pondered many times what could be ripening beneath the surface of her reserve, until the day I needed to use her computer on one of my visits to London. When I asked her mother for the password that opened the computer, she replied: “Palestine.”

MUSA BUDEIRI

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I am doubtful that there can be such a thing as a collective Palestinian memory of the events of 1948. I use the term “events” consciously and deliberately; the term “nakba” has a cataclysmic ring that sounds hollow. Perhaps this is a generational thing, but I feel it is more than that. The plain fact is that Palestinian society was not only socially and economically differentiated, and consequently affected in different ways by 1948 and its aftermath, but it was also geographically differentiated. Physical uprooting, expulsion, destitution—this was the experience of a sizable segment of the Palestinians, perhaps the majority, but by no means all. For those who stayed put and whose towns and villages were not conquered by the Israeli army, I am not sure that 1948 constitutes a watershed. British rule in Palestine lasted a mere thirty-two years, a brief interlude after the centuries of Ottoman rule, and there was no hopeful expectation that this would be a lasting state of affairs.

For those who remained in what became known as Jordan's West Bank—and I am coldheartedly discounting the thousands of refugees who populated the camps—the “nakba” came much later. Perhaps in June 1967, but more probably as a process over a number of years starting with the occupation and culminating in the Oslo Accord and the beginning of the implementation of the autonomy agreement. If on the individual level this did not result in physical expulsion or material destitution, on the collective level the abandonment of hope and resignation to defeat constitute a “nakba” of much larger proportions. Although I hesitate even to allow myself to think this (at least most of the time), I sometimes imagine that after 1948 there was not a single Palestinian people, but numerous ones, all appearing outwardly to cling to the same identity (though even this is debatable), yet without much in common. But perhaps an analysis grounded in material reality is not part and parcel of “imagined identities.” And in time, thanks largely to Israel and to the postcolonial Arab state system, the Palestinians have indeed come to regard themselves as a single people with shared interests and a common identity. This is so notwithstanding the widespread recognition that there are Kuwaiti Palestinians, Jordanian Palestinians, Lebanese Palestinians, Syrian Palestinians, Israeli Palestinians, and of course *Sulta* Palestinians, to name only the larger concentrations. Thus the question of whether or not the Palestinians have become one people has not lost its relevance.

Growing up in “Jordanian” Jerusalem in the 1950s, what strikes me most today is the total absence of Palestine and things Palestinian in my then-worldview, both as a child and as an adolescent. True, on my daily trip to school I walked in the shadow of the wall built by the Jordanian army presumably to protect people from Israeli sniper fire, but the task it actually fulfilled was much more ominous—it rendered not only the enemy, but Palestine itself, invisible. East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as the name implied, were no longer Palestine but Jordan; “Palestine” was *over there*, beyond the flimsy wall that started at Damascus Gate and stretched all the way to Shaykh Jarrah.

Things were not much different at home. I can barely remember references to Palestine or to the events of 1948, not to mention prior to 1948. At various stages I had garnered some rudimentary facts, such as that my family had lived in the Qatamon quarter of West Jerusalem, and that some time not long after the Haganah blew up the Semiramis Hotel not far from our house, my mother fled with me and my elder sister in tow to Gaza to stay with relatives, after which she continued on to Alexandria where she was joined by my father. Some months later, prevented from returning to their own home in West Jerusalem, now occupied by Israel, my family managed to return, and not without difficulty, to the Jordanian-occupied part of the city. This was the sum total of my knowledge up to 1967. I had once asked my father, who had an obsessive love for books, why he did not have a library, and he replied that he used to have one, but that it was lost in 1948 along

with *everything else*. He did not elaborate. The conversation ended there and then. Why? I am not sure I have an answer to this day.

The outbreak of the June 1967 war coincided with the end of my first year at university. Having been shipped off to school in England on the occasion of my sixteenth birthday, I had little awareness of the events taking place in the Arab world beyond the little that I could glean from the tightly controlled media during my annual visits to Jerusalem for the summer holidays. Even before that, having grown up in the culturally arid atmosphere of Jordanian-ruled Jerusalem and attending St. George's, a British-run Anglican missionary school where the language of instruction was English, my knowledge of the Arab world and the social and political currents within it had been minimal. There was, however, a striking war atmosphere in the British media following the closure of the Straits of Tiran, and it seemed certain that the region was heading toward war. Curiously enough, this did not cause me much concern. Having derived my information from the British media, which emphasized the overwhelming superiority of the Arab side in terms of numbers, armaments, and so on, I was confident that the Arabs would beat Israel. I had no personal recollections of the Suez War, but I accepted the prevailing Arab opinion that grew in its aftermath, first that it was a victory, and secondly that Israel would have been defeated had Britain and France not stepped in. This time, Israel was going to be defeated. I did not speculate much beyond that, and I did not see the approaching conflagration through a Palestinian prism. This was a war between Israel and the Arab states, but the object was not the liberation of Palestine. Not that I lacked enthusiasm, but my worldview was not very colored by my Palestinian identity. If I remember rightly I used to identify myself at the time as a Jordanian of Palestinian origin. Being Arab was more meaningful to me. The Arab defeat when it came was too swift for me to be able to deal with rationally.

Shortly after the war, I made the trip to the Israeli Embassy in London and demanded to be allowed to return to Jerusalem. I refused the explanations of the stonewalling official regarding my Jordanian passport, and I remember clearly affirming that I *went with Jerusalem*. Since the Israelis were now in control of Jerusalem, they had to find a way of getting me back to it. In retrospect, perhaps this is the strongest attachment I have felt, despite the fact that unlike many others, I have never been able to discern Jerusalem's physical charms, nor do I have fond memories of childhood or adolescence. Even my recollections of the city's physical contours in the 1950s are vague, and when I talk to contemporaries, I am amazed by their recollections of the changing physical aspects of the city to which I am oblivious.

Filastin to my mind is inextricably linked with Israel. I cannot separate the two. When I make the short drive from Jerusalem down to the coast and stroll around Shenken Street in Tel Aviv or browse through Shouk Ha Karmel, I feel I am in Palestine. I know it is not Jaffa *'Arus al-Bahr*, that this was not some Arab quarter that had been taken over and "ethnically cleansed," but I also know that *Filastin* in 1948 *was* ethnically cleansed.

Nevertheless, I cannot help but feel whenever I make the fifty-minute drive to Yaffa/Tel Aviv that I have arrived in Palestine. I don't have this feeling in Nablus, nor in Amman, by far the largest Palestinian city in the world. The fact that Tel Aviv is teeming with Jews is itself an intrinsic part of this feeling. I cannot visualize *my Palestine* without Jews. I try to keep myself under control by recalling numbers and hard facts: the Jews were a minority in 1948, their ownership of land was minuscule, and so on. I know that this is not what Palestine would have looked, smelled, and felt like before 1948. But I have no recollection of *Filastin*, not even a second-hand one. The Palestine I know is the one I discovered on that first visit to Jerusalem and points westward after the June war, though I only really came to know the place in the aftermath of September 1970. And this Palestine was already Israel.

June 1967 was the historical divider between "before" and "after," but in retrospect the events of September 1970 drove home in personal terms the meaning of identity and the dimensions of defeat. I had traveled in the summer of 1970 from London to Amman, lured like thousands of young Arabs (and numerous non-Arabs) by the promise of "the armed struggle" and its empowering potential. The rude awakening came with the swift defeat at the hands of the Jordanian army and what I perceived to be the disintegration of the Palestinian leadership. Some prominent leaders who fell into the hands of the Jordanian army made radio appeals calling for an end to the fighting, while those who remained at liberty saw their salvation in the intervention of "friendly" Arab states—the same ones they had denounced for their dismal performance in June 1967. I believe it was then that I decided that I wanted to go back and live in Jerusalem. This was the closest I could get to *Filastin*; an occupied and a divided city to be sure, but I saw that as an advantage. Living in Jerusalem would enable me to overcome at will what was both an imaginary and a physical border.

Until the outbreak of the intifada in December 1987, the occupation had in fact reunited Palestine, or at least effected a re-Palestinization of the West Bank. There were negative sides, to be sure. One was the separation from the Arab world, which resulted in a lack of social and cultural development. The West Bank, as many Palestinian returnees discovered to their dismay in the early 1990s, was frozen in time. I began teaching at Birzeit in 1974 and despite all the hype soon discovered that the university, modest in its resources and not particularly blessed in its faculty and administration, functioned essentially as an export factory for the manpower-hungry economies of the Gulf. Although I did not realize it at the time, it was foolish to expect the place to be an island of enlightenment. Socially and culturally it was part of its natural environment, a closed and conservative society nurtured by the sterile years of Jordanian rule on which was superimposed the arbitrary rule of the military occupation (though Israeli interference in the daily workings of the university was, to my surprise, less than I had expected).

All these shortcomings notwithstanding, I felt myself particularly lucky. I wanted to live in Palestine, and for the time being Birzeit was the vehicle that

allowed me to do so. I could cross the imaginary border at will, traveling to Nazareth, Beersheba, Shafa'amer, Rameh, Ramat Aviv, or wherever. Unlike many of my acquaintances, I never saw myself as an outsider in Israel. Although I am sure that for most Israelis I was an unwelcome intruder, I saw my presence in the smallest and most remote corner as one of *right*. One instance I particularly remember was looking for somewhere to stay in the occupied Syrian Heights and, unable to do so, finally ending up in a kibbutz guest house on the Israeli side of the border. Kibbutz Hagoshrim, I soon found out, made its living by manufacturing night sights for Israeli tanks. With my one-year-old son in tow, I took up the advertised offer to see their products exhibit. Although I have no particular interest in tank sights, I felt I had to make my presence known. Irrespective of the Jewish inhabitants, the kibbutz, the tank sights, this was *my Palestine*.

There has always been an unresolved tension when the issue is reduced to flesh-and-bone Israelis. I mean Jews, of course. There is also a tension where Arabs who reside in Israel are concerned, but this is usually quickly overcome. Both sides go out of their way to accommodate each other. This is of course a temporary arrangement and recognized as such by both. With Jews this is not the case. As far as they are concerned, I feel I remain invisible. They do not see me, they definitely do not recognize my presence in their midst, although they are an integral part of *my Filastin*. Irrespective of the length of my stay in Jerusalem, the only Jews I meet are the ones I have to meet—that is, officials of all sorts, whether civilian or military (though mostly, of course, of the latter type). While living in London, I had a large circle of Israeli friends and acquaintances, yet living in Jerusalem with no physical barrier between the Arab and Jewish parts of the city, there seems to be an insurmountable chasm that militates against any kind of social interaction. Hundreds of Jews travel daily on the road in front of my house on their way from West Jerusalem to the Hebrew University campus on Mount Scopus. Not infrequently, some stop to ask for directions and fall speechless when I respond to their questions in Arabic. The presence of Arabs in the city always comes as a surprise to them. The use of Arabic in itself seems to pose a dangerous threat. This was driven home to me on the occasion of a protest meeting at a Tel Aviv University forum in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when I happened to meet General Aharon Yariv, a lukewarm dove even by Israeli standards. He addressed me in Hebrew, and I replied in English that I did not speak Hebrew. His rejoinder was a revelation: "It is not that you do not speak Hebrew, it's that you *refuse* to speak it," he said. Although it took me some time, I eventually came to see the wisdom of his words. Now, everywhere I travel in Israel/Palestine I insist upon speaking Arabic. In *my Palestine*, Arabic is the lingua franca. I have made my *historic compromise*. Now it is the turn of the Jews.