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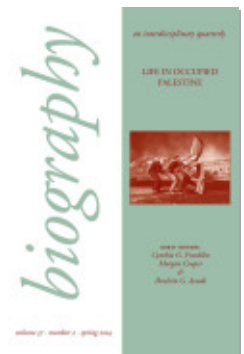
Once Upon a Border: The Secret Lives of Resistance—the
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ONCE UPON A BORDER: THE SECRET LIVES OF RESISTANCE— THE CASE OF THE PALESTINIAN VILLAGE OF AL-MARJA, 1949–1967

HONaida GHANIM

DOMESTIC ETHNOGRAPHY IN AL-MARJA

My home village, al-Marja, forms a unique case study through which one may thoroughly understand how its Palestinian residents experienced and lived through the dramatic, life-transforming events of the Nakba and foundation of the State of Israel on the one hand, and the implications of partitioning Palestinians on the other. Al-Marja's residents' widespread stories, spanning the period between 1949 and 1967, during which the village served as an excellent "borderline fence," present a significant opportunity for understanding how Palestinians in general and the village residents in particular dealt with the border's violent invasion of their lives and the fragmentation of their locale, severing it between "enemy" forces. In this context, my intimate knowledge of the place and familiarity with the details of my family stories—having lived with people who have experienced this dramatic change—have given me a unique advantage not only for recording the events, but also, and more importantly, for closely studying the residents' social dynamics, political and national production, and consequent linguistic reformulations and symbolic redefinitions for understanding reality. I could call what I do "domestic ethnography"—ethnography that is completely based on the researcher's direct experience of the event. But besides being an observer noting and recording my direct experience of my house, family, and neighborhood, and storing them in my memory and personalizing them, I am also an interactive ethnographer who affected the sequence of events and their underpinnings.

It is no secret that in recording the stories of my village's experience of the borders I wished to take on an active and self-aware role in spreading the story of the indigenous group to which I belong—a group whose experience with the borders still prevents it from easily trusting outside researchers, as my first-hand experience has taught me. Two years ago, I attempted to conduct a joint research project with a Jewish-Israeli colleague about the lives of Palestinians in the village during military rule. When I went with him to talk to my eldest uncle, who has told me many stories about this period, my uncle refused to speak of anything that had to do with “politics,” and all my attempts to assure him of the anonymity and confidentiality of the interview were in vain.

Truth be told, his refusal did not surprise me, for even though I grew up hearing the family stories of borders and family members' constant infiltration of the border, I was also raised to understand that these stories were confidential, and that we were supposed to hear them and forget them. It was not easy for my uncle to talk to a stranger of how his brother would sneak in at night to visit them, nor of how he would disguise himself to attend family social events. These were private stories veiled with secrecy, and were not to be disclosed to anyone back then. This was not only my uncle's concern, but also that of my fellow village residents. For even though they knew who I was and where I came from, they were still hesitant to speak of a time that holds nothing but painful memories for them. One of the interviews I conducted at the end of October 2013 was with an eighty-year-old man. When he started speaking of his imprisonment in Jordan, his wife interrupted him, smiling at me to give the impression of jesting:

دير بالك بحكيك، بدكاش اياها تورطك

“watch out for your words; you don't want her getting you in trouble.”

For even though more than half a century had passed since his suffering, both he and his wife still found it hard to completely trust that he was safe.

While speaking to my parents, relatives, and neighbors, it became as clear as daylight to me that fear was a decisive factor in determining “the economics of narration”; that is, in deciding what to say, how to say it, and to whom to speak. For every time I started asking about the stories that the village residents lived through, I encountered a number of hesitant looks, even after I assured them that the story was going to be published anonymously and without disclosing any personal details. To understand the depth of terror stemming from the consequences of statements, disclosures that today seem completely ordinary to us, we must place them within the historical context of a military rule that had infiltrated all aspects of the residents' lives, invaded familial relations, and engulfed people with fear.

I remember what my late grandmother, who died in the mid-nineties of the past century, had once told me about “confidentiality” and secrecy, which could shed some light on this question of fear. She told me that once her brother found out, many years later, about his nephew’s infiltration of the borders in order to meet his mother, he reprimanded her: “did you think I was going to report your son to the Israelis?! Would I ever betray my nephew?!” My grandmother told me she never answered his question, claiming instead that she didn’t want him to know anything that could get him into trouble. However, she told me that she really was afraid of him, her own brother. How could she not, since he had been accused of having suspicious relations with the Israeli “intelligence,” known back then as the “Shin Bet.” My grandmother told this story to me, but I don’t believe she would have told it to anyone else.

My belonging to the village, and my organic and intricate relations with the place, could also hinder me, first as a woman, and second as part of the social structure, which could be embarrassing when meeting the men of the village, an embarrassment that I overrode through asking my father to accompany me during my visits. However, these were latent factors even in my own family home!

Confidential meetings between family relatives were a common practice among the border-torn residents, and keeping them secret demanded strict rules of heightened caution. As a member of those discrete families who lived through these precautions for many years, I had the unique opportunity of conducting my own domestic ethnography. I listened to the whispering voices and mysterious, tense stories. I followed them and tried to extract the stories from the residents, despite their concerns. The main point here is that these stories form an alternate narrative to the official ones, often titled “Arabs in Israel under the Military Rule,” which revolved around life in the village, its residents’ lifestyle, their relationship with the state, tribal tensions, conflicts between traditions and modernity, and so on. That official narrative is what I’m trying to avoid here by giving voice to the marginal, repressed, secretive, and underground, which may be found in the stories of borders and their circumvention. These stories of circumvention, infiltration, and illegal border crossing are also the stories of the conflict between the settler and the indigenous.

It is important to note here that this project departs from some of the traditional objectives for historical research. It does not aspire to accurately convey the “truth” of events. Rather, I attempt to get as close as possible to an understanding of the redefinitions that occurred for residents as the area transformed into a borderland. In other words, I aim to capture the effect on residents of a place transitioning from familiar to “strange,” from intimate to “endangered.” I am interested as well in attending to the methods and tools of resistance produced by this transformation of place, which was enforced without the least

regard for the social reality on the ground, and which formed a division as real as it was arbitrary for those Palestinians it impacted so dramatically.

BORDERS: TENSION BETWEEN THE PROCLAIMED AND DISGUISED FUNCTION

A border may be defined as the division between two things. In the Arabic dictionary “Lissan el –Arab,” a border divides two things to prevent their mixing with each other, or to prevent one from attacking the other. Its plural is “borders.” A border is also the ending to everything; it constitutes a limit. In political science, borders are defined as divisions between political entities or countries produced as a result of an agreement, war, or force of threat. Their designated role is to divide, but as Gloria E. Anzuldúa has pointed out in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, borders will affect residents sociologically, psychologically, and sentimentally. This is particularly so in the Palestinian case, where by transforming the “geographic continuity” of the place, borders had a definitive impact on the people, dividing and dispersing them, as well as befuddling and estranging their intimate connection with the place.

Although the “official” function of a border is to separate, divide, and guarantee that things do not mix, in practice a border also forms a “meeting place” and serves as a “conveyor belt” between the separated parts. A border is thus a contradictory structure that simultaneously prevents and permits, separates and connects, and that consequently provides its own tools for circumventing itself. And even though a border’s official and declared “function” is to use force (symbolic or actual) to cut, separate, sever, and prevent mixture, borderline residents who have been forcibly divided turn the border into a crossing (“illegal” of course) to transgress and circumvent its official and proclaimed function. And it is this unconscious political definition of the border that is constantly being repressed and suppressed.

The “unofficial” function of borders as a means of both meeting and of circumventing enforced severance and division manifests itself in many state-imposed borderline areas, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the United States and Mexico, and Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In reality, borders have come to accommodate the secretive, mischievous, troublemaking, and criminal, which unsettle the state and its parastatal branches.

In this context, one can understand the conflicting function of the Armistice Line, which was set by Jordan and Israel in 1949. Nowadays known as the Green Line, it worked within the sphere of separation and determination, dispersing Palestinian residents of those areas among two political entities, enforcing the borders on the ground, and threatening whoever crossed them with death. These borders, however, were also the only physical zone through which Palestinians were able to reunite and circumvent the severance

of division. Such is the case in *Bab al-Shams*, Elias Khoury's novel, in which the protagonist, Younes, infiltrates the night despite the guards' presence, crossing from Lebanon into Galilee to see his wife Nahila and live the best days of his life with her. Borders are thus both the ailment and the treatment, both poison and medicine. Khoury encapsulates this idea in *Bab al-Shams*:

ما يستحق أن نموت من أجله , هو ما نريد أن نعيشه

"That which deserves our life sacrifice is precisely that which we wish to live for."
(author's translation)

In his book *Palestinian Identity*, Rashid Khalidi notes the special relationship between Palestinians and borders, arguing that the experience of crossing borders is integral to Palestinian identity. These borders may be official state borders or unofficial fences and checkpoints, spread out between the different Palestinian cities and villages, and even at certain points in history, in other countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. Palestinians enter an extreme state of alertness the moment they must present an identification card. Many questions amalgamate at this moment as they prepare to receive "the special treatment in store." At that moment they are forcibly reminded who they are and how they differ from others.

Khalidi adds that borders are a real problem not only because Palestinian identity is confusing to those in power, but also because borders are incriminating by definition. Hence, one may understand the state of fear or tension that strikes the Palestinian upon entering an airport, an international crossing, or a checkpoint in anticipation of the inevitable forthcoming special treatment, which naturally reflects the image of the suspicious Palestinian that entire countries have formed, particularly Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and of course Israel too—that is, the countries that the Palestinian constantly passes through.

The experience of crossing and repositioning oneself within borders is a passing experience of "geographic distribution" and a main "axis" for constructing and understanding the meaning and essence of Palestinian identity, which may be summarized in the simple question that Palestinians ask of friends and relatives right after they cross any border or checkpoint: "Did they give you too much trouble?," a question that reveals the extent to which the experience of borders defines Palestinian identity.

I grew up listening to family members' stories about the borders that infiltrated their lives in 1949. I listened to my relatives as they narrated how borders decontextualized them, dispersed their families, and disintegrated their social structure. I also listened to them as they told stories of how they tried to connect with family members on the other side of the border, despite the

threats and the fear, and of how the “smuggling industry” flourished. And I heard those stories mixed with accounts of “enemy” informants.

My great grandfather lived in al-Marja, while his wife lived with his son in Shweika village. My uncle lived on the eastern side, while his father (my grandfather) and his siblings lived on the western side of the border; also my grandfather’s siblings and his mother, they too lived on the eastern side. At the beginning, everyone thought that the stacked border stones collected from the mountain and arbitrarily placed at the eastern and southern sides of our village, separating different areas, were merely symbolic and would not unsettle their world nor control their lives. Thus, my grandfather kept up his visits to his wife and son. Gradually, however, with the increasing amount of surveillance, this became much harder to do. He toiled at escaping the gaze of the surveillors, only to have them upgrade their tools of surveillance. But he persisted in his visits until 1960, when his wife was deported to an unknown place. According to my father, his father was imprisoned for a few months in those years; he later went back to look for his wife, but to no avail. He was told that she had been deported in a military vehicle to an unknown place. My grandfather passed away in August 1967, two months after the occupation of the West Bank. When his wife and son came back looking for him, he was counted among the dead.

The traces of the borderline stones near my parents’ house, which used to constitute the border, aroused the village children’s curiosity and mine—we children who were born after the 1967 *Naksa*¹ [setback] and the “reunification” of the homeland upon the occupation of the remainder of Palestine. After the occupation those borders became a mere trace of a remote past, but maybe because of that, they were engulfed with mystery and burdened with the unknown. Who put these signs here? What do they mean? Are they merely signs or a secret code? Do they hide something? What would happen if we were to dig underneath? If we destroyed them? Would we be imprisoned? Persecuted? Should we fear proximity to them? I never spared a chance to ask my grandfather, grandmother, uncles, and whoever was available about them.

It wasn’t only the stony signs that struck me, but also the ruins of houses neglected at the outskirts of the village right next to the “borders.” Each time I passed them I felt scared, but still I entered their ruined blocks and tried to understand something about them. The stones of course did not speak, but they oozed dampness, a smell that characterizes forsaken houses. This, then, is a forsaken house. It used to be a home for humans; so, where are they now? Where did they go? Can their ghosts rise from the rubble and haunt us because we invaded their private space? Where was the kitchen? Did they have a backyard? Was this thorn field their land at some point? How I wished these ruins would tell their stories of childhood and youth.

BETWEEN PROHIBITION AND PERMISSION: 1949, DRAWING THE ARMISTICE LINE, AND PARTITIONING THE PLACE

כשהייתי כבר מנהל התכנון השתתפתי בסימון הגבול בין מדינת ישראל לירדן בים המלח. עשינו זאת במסגרת סימון קו שביתת הנשק בין שתי המדינות. הירדנים לא רצו להשתתף בפרוייקט הסימון, אבל הסכימו שאנחנו נבצע את המדידה. האו"ם היה המתווך בינינו. את המדידות עשינו באמצעות מכשיר חדש, הטלרומטר (מד מרחק אלקטרוני). בעזרת המכשיר הקמתי רשת נקודות בהרים שממערב לים המלח. משלוש נקודות עשינו חתכים אל הים, ורפסודה שהייתה בים התמקמה במפגש החתכים (שתי נקודות כיוונו את הרפסודה, והשלישית שימשה כביקורת). בכל נקודת מפגש כזו נזרק מצוף מחובר למשקולת, והמצופים סימנו את הגבול עם ירדן בים המלח. (מתוך ראיון עם שתרוג, לשעבר מנכ"ל מפ"י)

When I used to be the head of cartography, I participated in outlining the borders at the Dead Sea between the State of Israel and Jordan. We did that within the context of tracing the ceasefire line between the two states. The Jordanians didn't participate in the mission but they agreed that we do it. The United Nations was our mediator. We carried out the measurements through a new device, an electronic distance meter. Through the device I was able to survey a network of points in the mountains west of the Dead Sea. From three points we were able to create three lines towards the sea, and the buoy anchored in the sea would be placed at the meeting point of these lines (two points directed the buoy, and the third was for comparison). In each of these meeting points I threw in a buoy tied to an anchor. These anchors marked the borders between us and Jordan. (From an interview with Zion Shitrug; see also Horovitz; author's translation from the Hebrew)

The battles between the Zionist forces and Palestinians started at the end of 1947, after the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, which recommended the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state established on 49 percent of Palestine's lands and an Arab state established on 47 percent, leaving three percent of the land for Jerusalem, to be under a Special International Regime.² At that time the Jews who came to Palestine as colonial immigrants comprised only a third of the residents, and the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular rejected the resolution, considering it unjust to them and to their homeland.

On May 14, 1948, the eve of the day that the British Mandate of Palestine ended and withdrew its forces, David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine—"Israel." Until that moment, Palestinians were the only people resisting the Zionist enterprise, a resistance



Criss-crossed at various times by lines of war and cease fire, Al-Marja ultimately was severed by the Armistice Agreement line—the Green Line—from its age-old relationships with the surrounding communities.



that failed for a number of reasons.³ Once Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel, the Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi, and Lebanese armies declared war, but failed to achieve military victory. Jordan shares the longest borderline, about 500 square kilometers, but its forces did not approach the newly formed state at all. Some contend that Jordan's abstinence had been pre-coordinated with the Zionist leadership, an argument confirmed by Abdullah el-Tell in his diaries of the 1948 War. A number of historical records suggest that King Abdullah of Jordan entered the war because he wished to control the Arabic part of the state and annex it to his rule. Regardless of the reasons for and political interpretations of the events on the ground, records show that many United Nations decisions demanded that the conflicted parties reach a ceasefire.

The first ceasefire started on June 11, 1949, but lasted only until July 18. In December 1948, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 62, demanding that each side reach an immediate ceasefire and calling for an armistice agreement (United Nations, "Resolution"). In light of the military losses of the Arab armies, negotiations for a truce commenced. One must note that by the end of 1948, the Zionist forces had succeeded in controlling a larger portion of Palestine, expelling and displacing 750,000–900,000 Palestinians, destroying 531 cities and villages, and confiscating the property of those it expelled, using military force to prevent the native inhabitants from returning to their houses and villages (Ghanim).

On a regional level, and under the supervision of the United Nations, the Arab countries whose armies participated in the war (Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon) entered into bilateral negotiations to reach a ceasefire agreement with Israel. Held on the Greek island of Rhodes—after which the negotiations were named—the talks started officially on January 12, 1949, and aimed at determining the ceasefire lines and conditions, as well as founding a joint military committee. The first agreement was signed between Israel and Egypt on February 24, 1949, the second was with Lebanon on March 23 of the same year, followed by Jordan's signature in April, and finally the Armistice Agreement with Syria in July 1949.⁴

The Armistice Agreement between Jordan and Israel, signed in Rhodes on April 3, 1949, was of special significance. It directly affected the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians, redrawing the ceasefire line and transferring entire villages into Israel, severing their residential and vital continuity—and all of course without taking the residents' opinions into consideration. The Israeli government entrusted its delegation with a document comprised of several points from which the negotiators could not deviate, and these points had a direct effect on the Palestinian residents. One guideline, for example, ordered that "the delegation must demand the redrawing of the frontier line

located at the south-eastern side of Wadi Ara so that the entire road of Hadera-Afula would be under Israel's control" (Rosenthal 26).

The Armistice Agreements rendered the Zionist forces' military achievement—the ethnic cleansing of Palestine—into “political gain.” They also turned Israel, both regionally and internationally, into a “state” by the policy of *fait accompli*, as recognized by Major General and later director of Israeli military intelligence and professor Yehoshafat Harkabi, who took part in the Jordanian talks in Rhodes: “Signing the agreements practically legitimized Israel's military achievements and contributed to accepting Israel as a member of the United Nations, allowing it to start building its institutions and establish itself as a country” (294–95; author's translation).

Ariella Azoulay critiques this legitimization by using Walter Benjamin's idea of transformation from a state of mythic violence to a state of law-preserving violence (or what is termed in Israeli discourse as the transformation from a *Yishuv* into a country). The operations of ethnic cleansing and the enforcement of borders demarcating the territory of the “Jewish State” constituted part of the mythic violence: they obliterated the indigenous landscape while establishing the colonial landscape. The Demarcation Line determined by the Rhodes Armistice Agreements institutionalized the aftermath of the mythic violence, and initiated the “law-preserving” violence. By limiting Palestinian mobility, position, and legal ties to place, delegitimizing the return to home villages, setting up a borderline fence preventing any actual connection with the places from which they were forcibly expelled by threats and the distress of war, the new Zionist state set out to transform the colonial immigrant Jew into the legal resident of the country while rendering the indigenous residents into “passersby” in their own homeland.

Later, and again after the war of 1967, the operations of “moving borders”—its lines and tools (fences, checkpoints, and walls)—became ways to enforce further imperial expansion and transform the demographic landscape. “Setting” zones as military and restricted, establishing some lands for military use and others for civil use, stretching the “borders” of settlements and Jewish towns, and eventually defining some zones for Palestinians and others for settlers became active means for Judaizing the place, thus tightening the reins on its indigenous residents.

On a Palestinian level, the intensified presence of the borders and their mechanisms (such as crossing stations and checkpoints), and their violent and arbitrary infiltration into daily life, rendered the stories of the borders into a personal and collective Palestinian “history.” It is almost impossible to find a Palestinian who doesn't have a story of borders and checkpoints, regardless of whether he or she is a refugee in the diaspora, in the occupied territories, or within Israel. It is there—at checkpoints and borders—that the fragility

of Palestinians' political status often manifests, and that the introduction to "arbitrary" and "haphazard" power in its many shapes and forms intensifies in the Palestinian experience. As Joseph Massad writes, the "tenacity" of the cause and the perpetuation of its roots render the Palestinian border stories as a founding component of identity construction and a "narration axis" passed down generation to generation. It is completely normal today for a grandfather to narrate his "evasion" and infiltration of the borders in 1948, as his son tells of the trouble he goes through when crossing international borders, and the grandson tells of his daily crossings of checkpoints, circumvention of the wall, or evasion of a military base.

The second clause of Article IV of the Armistice Agreement between Jordan and Israel states:

2. The basic purpose of the Armistice Demarcation Lines is to delineate the lines beyond which the armed forces of the respective Parties shall not move.

The third clause of Article IV addresses the prevention of civilians from crossing the Armistice lines:

3. Rules and regulations of the armed forces of the Parties, which prohibit civilians from crossing the fighting lines or entering the area between the lines, shall remain in effect after the signing of this Agreement with application to the Armistice Demarcation Lines defined in articles V and VI.

As the village residents and historic records note, prior to signing the Armistice Agreement, Iraqi forces were settled in the village. However, the agreement between Israel and Jordan stated that the Hashemite Kingdom would replace those forces, after the Iraqis authorized Jordan to represent them, as was clarified in the agreement. As for the Demarcation Line, it was agreed that the existing line would be modified, moving it east of the line connecting Wadi Ara and Jaljulia; on the ground, that meant the annexation of The Triangle area to Israel. Article VI, clause 3 of the Agreement states:

3. The Armistice Demarcation Line provided for in paragraph 2 of this article shall be established in stages as follows, pending which the existing military lines may be maintained:
 - (a) In the area west of the road from Baqa to Jaljulia, and thence to the east of Kafr Qasim: within five weeks of the date on which this Armistice Agreement is signed;
 - (b) In the area of Wadi Ara north of the line from Baqa to Zubeiba: within seven weeks of the date on which this Armistice Agreement is signed;

(c) In all other areas of the Iraqi sector: within fifteen weeks of the date on which this Armistice Agreement is signed.

A number of historic records note that prior to signing the Armistice Agreement, the Israeli and Jordanian sides held confidential bilateral talks.⁵ Jordan was informed of Israel's wish to control part of the lands that extend between Jenin and Qalqiliya, despite the fact that these areas were inhabited by thousands of Palestinian families in tens of villages. And as Abdullah el-Tell clarifies in his diaries, a recurring message was delivered to the King from Yehoshafat Harkabi, Israel's delegate, stating that Jordan's refusal to recede from these areas would drive Israel into a military confrontation to control them by force (see also Harkabi). Israel claimed that these places had security and strategic significance that could not be given up. Israel, for example, wanted control over Umm al-Fahm, today a large city with a population of more than 50,000, because it was located on Mt. Iskander, which was considered strategic because it overlooks a large area of Marj Ibn Amer, some areas in the West Bank, Mt. Carmel, and even Caesarea's beach. This seems to be the reason for Israel's annexing al-Marja village as well, as it is located atop a high hill from which one can easily overlook large areas of the coastal valley extending from Hadera in the north and Herzliya in the center.

RUPTURING PLACES AND DISPERSING RESIDENTS

The Demarcation Line passed between the inhabited Palestinian villages in areas extending from Wadi Ara to Jaljulia—later termed by Israel the Triangle—dividing entire families and separating inhabitants from their lands, livelihoods, and social networks. It divided, for example, Barta'a and Baqa into four villages, turning the lives of the Palestinians dwelling nearby upside down.

Until the drawing of the Demarcation Lines, the residents of the Palestinian villages surrounding Tulkarm, Jenin, and Qalqiliya were economically and socially connected. The city of Tulkarm, for example, was the urban center of the villages extending from Baqa al-Gharbiyye to Tira, while Jenin was the urban center of Umm al-Fahm and its surrounding villages, and Qalqiliya formed the center for the residents of Jaljulia, Kafr Qasim and Kafr Bara. In practice, the residents of these areas suffered less damage from the Nakba than the coastal residents did. They were neither expelled from their villages nor had their houses demolished. They continued to work their lands, and to a certain extent carried on with their lives, even though Palestine's future as a whole was unknown and more or less unsettling.

My uncle Abdullah describes the May 1949 border demarcations:

كنت مروح من المدرسة، مع اكم ولد، يا دوبك كان عمري عشر سنين، وعند راس التلة شفت ناس متجمعة، بيناتهم ضباط كثير، وقاعدين بيحطوا علالمات بالطريق. بعدين عرفت من ابوي انهم قاعدين بيحطوا علامات الحدود اللي اتفق عليها الاردنيين واليهود في رودوس.

I was on my way back from school with some other kids. I was barely ten years old at the time. I saw a crowd of people at the hilltop, among them were many officers and they were putting down signs on the road. I learned from my father that they were marking the borders as they were agreed upon between the Jordanians and Jews in Rhodes.

The Armistice Agreement affected al-Marja residents in two ways. First, it transformed their village into a “borderline village,” with all the implications that this carries in terms of redefining and reordering their space: the presence of Israeli security forces, the employing of informants from the village to survey the borders, the army’s treatment of those who “cross” the borders from nearby villages, and its supervision of the interaction of the residents, and the presence of Jordanian border guards settled at the eastern side of the village. Second, residents were arbitrarily separated from their close-knit social network in the cities of Tulkarm and Deir al-Ghusun, both of which were now situated on the other side of the border.

Designing the place according to the binaries of prohibition and permission, enforced through direct and indirect surveillance and punishment mechanisms, was a tangible way to translate the signed agreement into a reality, transforming the borders into tangible facts on the ground. Thus, the borderline was marked and signified by constructing a vertical line of plastered stones. Border guards and Jordanian patrols extended all along the borders, while the Israeli forces, as the villagers’ stories point out, passed by every other day and would not settle in one place. Moreover, there were no physical fences or walls installed in the ground, but only scattered signs and marks.

Hajjeh Um Fares, whose house is located right at those borderlines, says that she was terrified each time she passed by the borders. Her hands shaking, she told me:

يا الله قديش بقيت اخاف منها، ما كنت اقرب من الحجارة هذه، هذه حدود يعني بتموت خوف” وشو بتفكري الحدود؟

“Good heavens, how I feared them. We would never come close to these stones. These are terrifying borders.” “And what do you think borders are anyway?”

She turned to me, wondering:

يا حيللا حجارة مطنطره ومدهونة بالشيد، لا اسيجة ولا وديان ولا قنابل.
بس بقت تكفي منشان ترعبنا.

"They are nothing but a set of plastered stones, not a fence, a valley or a minefield. Still, they were enough to terrify us."

The actual division of Palestinian life in nearby villages struck the residents to heart, turning any kind of routine and normalcy in their daily lives into an inexplicable procedure, and affecting their familial, social, economic, and educational structures. In the beginning, the village residents thought that this was merely an official procedure and did not believe that it would be forced on them. Palestinians from both sides of the line sought to circumvent the borders, especially during the first few years. However, the reinforcement of military surveillance and the punishment of those who disobeyed military orders not to approach the borders, by labeling them infiltrators and shooting at them, consolidated the idea that the division marked by a heap of stones was "reality." Still, that did not mean that it was acceptable. Instead, residents developed guerilla methods and mechanisms for recapturing and practicing the ordinary, away from both the visible and invisible gaze of security forces.

Um el-Abed's story summarizes the life of secrecy and discretion:

لما تجوزت سنة 1955 كان عمري عشرين سنة، ومثل عادة الناس العرب وثتها سكنت ببيت واحد مع حماتي الارملة وبناتها الثلاثين، وحدة خاف الله عمرها بقى 22 سنة ووحدة 15 سنة. ام حماتي بقت عايشة حينها في الجهة العربية للحدود في الدير (دير الغصون)، وبقت كمان هي ارملة ووحيدة، وما الهاش حدا غير حماتي. بقت حماتي متعودة تتهرب وتروح تزورها وتتفقدها كل ما يصلحها طبعاً، بس امها تعبت وصحتها تأخرت كثير، وصار صعب الواحد يفارقها. قام اجا جوزي وقال خرينا نجيبها لعنا، وقال لاه التهرب صار صعب وهو صار يخاف انها تنكشف، وقالها وثتها احنا بندير بالنا انو ما خدا يعرف انا جيناها، واذا ماتت بيندفنها بساحة الدار. ابو العبد زبط الموضوع وجابها مع مهربين متخصصين، وجابها لعند بنتها الودحانية. المزبوط بقى وضها صعب كثير كثير، ولا تقدر تمشي ولا حتى تعمل حاجاتها البسيطة من غير ما نساعدنا. بعد اكم شهر وضعها يم صار بالمرّة مش منيح. وطبعاً ما خدا فينا دار بباليو يجبلها دكتور، لانا بدناس حدا يعرف انها عنا. وما شفنا واحنا بهالحالة الا جاي عنا هالحدا اللي الكل بيعرف انه فساد لليهود، وكنو حس انها عنا لانه سمع صوت عطس. طبعاً مسألش اذا عنا حدا، انو اصلاً بقى يسأل هيّك أسالة! اصلاً الكل كان يشك بالكل والكل يخاف انه ينفسد عنه. بعد يومين يم من هذه الزيارة ما شفنا الا الجيش جايينا، دخل الجنود وكانوا كلهم يهود دروز، دقوا على الباب وفتح لهم زوجي، وهو يرجرج. قالوا له عرفنا انه في بيتك مهربين. طبعاً جوزي شاف ساعتها انه مش راح يقدر يخبي. والله انها الحج ساعتها بقت تنازع، وبثبت انا وبنات حماتي وحماتي

حواليها نتوقع تطلع روحها بأي لحظة... يعني اشي بتصدقش. جوزي قلم مزبوط انا عندي مهربة وهاي المهربة ستي وجبتها هون لانها بدها تموت ومعندهاش حدا غير امي. ودخلهم علة الاوضة اللي احنا فيها، الحجة ممددة عالارض في حالة نزاع... وبطلع بروحها! كنهم لما شافوا هيك شفقوا عليه، وقالوا له احنا الاوامر معنا انه نوخذك انت واياها عالنقطة، بس عشان وضها هيك راح ندشرك. اذا ماتت ادفننها واحنا بنقول انا ما لثينا حدا بالدار، واذا ما ماتت بدك تيجي انت واياها بkra! وراحوا.

اقسم بالله، بانهم ما لحقوا يبعدوا الا اكم مية متر، والا هيا مطلعة الروح. ماتت. وجوزي لحق بيهم وصار ينادي بكل قوته لحد ما وصلهم: ماتت. هيا ماتت"

I was twenty when I got married in 1955. I lived, as is the tradition in Arab families back then, with my widowed mother-in-law and two of her daughters in the same house. One was twenty-two years old and the other was around fifteen. My mother-in-law's mother was living back then on the Arab side of the borders in Deir el-Ghusun village. She was a widow and alone, as she had only one daughter—my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law got used to evading and infiltrating the borders in order to visit her mother whenever possible. However, as the state of her mother's health deteriorated, it was impossible to leave her side. In light of the situation, my husband suggested that his grandmother be brought into the village. He told his mother that sneaking in has become more difficult and he fears she would be found out. He said that we will do our best so that no one knows about it, and once she passes away we will bury her in our courtyard. And indeed, Abu el-Abed arranged for 'fetching the grandmother' and smuggling her with professional smugglers, who brought her into her only daughter's house. Her situation was critical indeed. She was unable to walk or meet any of her daily needs without help. Things went well for a few months, and then the grandmother's health became extremely deteriorated. Naturally, we couldn't call for a doctor, as we didn't want anyone to find out about her living with us. However, in the shadow of her deteriorating state, a visitor, known for his shady relations with Jews, surprised us with a visit. He probably suspected her presence because he heard her coughing. Two days after his visit, the Israeli army surprised us with another. The soldiers came in; they were Jewish Druze.⁶ They knocked on the door; my husband, shaking, opened it for them. They told him they were informed that he was harboring some smuggled people. My husband decided that he could no longer hide it. Even though his grandmother was dying at the time, and my mother-in-law, her daughters, and myself were all huddled around her, expecting her spirit to leave her body at any moment, he did something crazy. My husband told them that the smuggled person is his grandmother, whom he brought in as she was about to die and had no one else to take care of her except for his mother, her only daughter. Then, he brought them into the room she was in, where she was lying on the ground, dying. The woman's soul was leaving her! It looks like they took pity on him when they saw her and told him that their orders were to bring both him and her to the checkpoint, but because of the direness of her situation, they would leave him alone. 'If she dies, bury her, and we'll say that we couldn't find anyone

in the house. But if she doesn't die, you must bring her in tomorrow!' Then they left the place.

I swear to God, they didn't even advance a few hundred meters when the grandmother took her last breath. She died. My husband followed the soldiers, yelling as loudly as possible and reaching them: 'she died . . . she died!'

A similar fate, though not always as tragic, befell most families. In 1949 Al-Marja was nothing but a small deserted town with a population no larger than 200. Its residents belong to Deir el-Ghusun village, which is located about twenty kilometers away by air. Not one family escaped the division of borders and its effect on their lives. Uncle Abdullah describes this impact:

بقيت ادرس بالصف الثالث سنة 1949 في الدير، في يوم اجانا مدير المدرسة عالصف وطلب مني انا وباقي الاولاد اللي من المرجة نوخذ غراضاتنا ونروح عبيوتنا، لانه زي ما قال تقرر انو تنتقل المرجة لليهود (كما اسموا إسرائيل حينها)، وانو الدير تظل مع العرب (يقصد الاردن). . . . مفهمتش اشي؟، حايطت اوراقي تبعت المدرسة ورجعت مشي انا وباقي الاولاد عبيوتنا.

In 1949 I was studying in third grade in the elementary school of Deir el-Ghusun village. One day, the school principal entered the classroom and asked me, and all other students from al-Marja, to grab our things and go back home. For, as the principal said, it was decided that al-Marja was now under Jewish reign (as they called Israel at the time), and that Deir el-Ghusun would remain with the Arabs (he meant Jordan). . . . I didn't understand a thing. I took my bag and put in it my school papers and walked back along with the village children to our houses.

My grandfather, grandmother, and their children became citizens of the State of Israel, and my grandfather's mother, his siblings, and their children became citizens of the Jordanian country, and in between the two states an uncrossable partition line was erected. Both Jordan and Israel regarded the other as an enemy state, even though they acted otherwise on all diplomatic levels and meetings, as Avi Shlaim clarified in his book *Collusion across the Jordan*.

Gradually, the regular and mundane family meeting between mothers and sons turned into a formal meeting at best and collaboration with the enemy at worst. Any person suspected to be in communication with the other side or to be hosting someone from the other side, be it a mother, a son, or a brother, was arrested and jailed.

During a family talk I arranged in order to ask my aunt, father, and uncles about life during the military rule, many stories about the interwoven relationships between colonizers and colonized came up: stories of resistance

and manipulating the colonizer even if it were through “developing an alternate, secret life.” There were also some unbelievable stories of the initial attempts of the colonized to gain the ruler’s approval, such as those willing to inform on their mothers to gain the master’s approval.

Addressing my father and uncle, my aunt asked:

بنتذكر شو اسمه كيف فسد هن اموه وحطها بالحبس

“Do you remember how ‘so-and-so’ informed on his mother and had her imprisoned?” Everyone laughs and curses him.

“Really?”

عنجد؟

“What’s the story?” I asked.

شو القصة

القصة انه كان حقير، ومنحط، فاجئ امه... وزوجة خاله بزيارة فلاقي عندهن في البيت ابن خالته، يعني ابن اخت امه!، اللي كان عمره خمستاشر سنة، واجي متهرب بالسّر من الدير، ولما روح من البيت راح دغري للتبليغ عند الحاكم. في اليوم التالي اعتقلوا امه ومهره أخوه وسجنوهن لمدة اسبوعين!

The story is that he was base and corrupt. He surprised his mother . . . and his uncle’s wife with a visit and found his cousin there—his mother’s sister’s son! The cousin was fifteen years old and one day snuck in from Deir el-Ghusun for a secret visit. When ‘so and so’ left the house, he went straight to the ruler to inform on them. The next day his mother and her brother’s wife were arrested and imprisoned for two weeks!

Israel treated these attempted visits as illegal actions and termed them as terrorist, criminal, and thuggish. Israeli soldiers shot bullets at or captured and punished “infiltrators.” This turned the borders into an actual death trap.⁷ Rashid Hussein writes in 1958 in his description of the borders:

حدودنا يا شاعري .. مقاصلاً مسنّنة
يصبُّ فيها الموتُ من خنادق مُحصّنة

Our borders, my poet, are sharp guillotines
Where death pours in from fortified trenches.
[author’s translation]

SAVING LANDS AND DISPERSING FAMILIES

The Armistice Line was modified numerous times. The village residents say that at the beginning, the line was placed east of the village, close to the valley that separates al-Marja from nearby Shweika village, which meant that the lands of Shweika residents were partly under Israeli rule, but this line was

adjusted once more, and the borders were moved to include the whole hill of Skweika within Israel. However, in order to assert their ownership of their lands on the Israeli side, the owners did as other families at risk of losing their lands did: they divided their families into two parts. One part of the family moved to the side that was supposed to be under Arab control, and another part stayed on the land that was supposed to be under Israeli rule.

For instance, five families from Shweika built simple houses at the southern side of the village and settled in them to avoid losing their land. They did so after they were informed that their land was going to be annexed to Israel. One thing to note here is that these families were a part of the larger families of Shweika, and were sent to settle in the family land in order to preserve it. At the beginning, these lands belonged to Jordan, but later they were annexed to Israel, right after the borders were adjusted. With this adjustment, the residents of this land were now under Israeli control, and the children of these families started going to school as their parents farmed their land. The children kept going to school until the year 1953, when, my father relates,

بقيت انا واخوي تيسير في نفس الصف لما اجت سيارة عسكرية واخذت
الاولاد، بقوا ثلاثة وكنا نمشي انا وهم واخوي يوميا من الدار والمدرسة، نادوهم
وقالوا لهم تعالوا معنا. طلغوا بالسيارة من دون ما يأخذوا اوراقهم وكتبهم،
واخذناهم اياهم بعدها انا وتيسير واعطيناهم لهم في بيتهم قبل ان يتم تحميلهم هم
وعائلاتهم وترحيلهم الى شويكة في الجانب الاردني.

My brother and I were in class when a military vehicle came and took the children. They were three and my brother and I would walk with them every day to school. They called their names and told them: come with us. They went into the car without taking their papers or books, which Taisir and I brought back for them later to their house right before they were taken and expelled into the other side of Shweika—the Jordanian side.

As for the houses, they were all destroyed, and the lands were confiscated. Ruins of five houses still exist today on the hilltop of the eastern side of my village. As for my father, when he asked, after 1967, about the fate of his childhood friends, who were then young men, he was told that one of them left for France, while the other left to work in Kuwait, and another to Britain; he never saw any of them again.

Many of the villagers were concerned about not being able to preserve their property and houses, and feared that their land, or parts of it, would fall on the other side of the borders, which means that they would lose it. Eighty-year-old Sami, whose house is located at the outskirts of the village, a few meters away from the borderline, says that when his father heard about the agreement in process, and when he saw a group of specialists marking

the delineation of the expected borders, he knew that his lands would be dispersed between the Jordanian and Israeli sides. And so he quickly built two living rooms on the side expected to come under Israeli control, and moved into them with his wife and two of his children, keeping his eldest son on the other side in the original family house. Sami says that those days were different. Unlike now, all friends and neighbors mobilized to finish the construction of the two rooms before the Jordanians or Israelis arrived:

ويهيك كنا قادرين نحافظ عأرضنا، بس كنا عمليا مفرقين. كنا بعاد اكم متر عن بعض. بس هو صار من سكان دولة وأنا سكان دولة ثانية

And indeed, this way we were able to keep our land, but we were practically fragmented. We were only a few meters away from my brother but he became a resident of one country and we of another.

Deciding to stay was not easy, but neither was the decision to divide the family. “I remember how, after the Israeli army entered and the borders were set.” Sami adds.

اليهود حصونا وطلبوا منا انا نضل يالنهيار في بيوتنا وفي الليل نطلع عالقرى القريبة. انا بتذكر كيف وقتها واحد من حيرانا اجي لابيوي وقالو انه بده يروح عند عيلته عشويكة (الجانب الاردني) لحديت ما تهذا الامور، لانه ما بده يعيش وسط هالبهذلات. ابيوي نصحة ما يروح. وقاله اذا بتروح مش راح تقدر ترجع وراح تخسر كل اراضيك- حوالي 400 دونم- بس هو لا سباب ما اعتقد انه كل الموضوع ما راح يطول. وراح طلع هو وعيلته عند اهله وطبعاً مقدرش يرجع الا بعد حرب 67 بعد ما كل املاكه تحولت لمال الغائب.

The Jews counted us and asked us to stay at home during the day and evacuate it during the evening and stay in nearby villages during the night. I remember then one of the neighbors came up to my father and told him that he was going to join his family on the Jordanian side of Shweika until things calmed down, as he did not want to live through this harassment. My father advised him not to do so, and told him that if he were to leave he would not be able to return and would lose all his property. But he insisted. He used to own about 400 dunams, but for some reason he thought that the whole business wouldn't last too long. And so it happened, he and his family left to his parents' house and he couldn't return until after 1967, for a visit only, with all his property declared as absentee property.

مش راح تصدقيني وأنا راح أحكي وأبوكي بيعرف القصة اللي راح احكيها ومين اللي عملها!

"You won't believe what I'm about to tell you, and I'll tell it and your father knows the story I'm about to tell and who did it." While looking at my father, who had accompanied me for the interview, Sami continued,

اجت المرأة اللي اهلها كانوا يملكوها هاي الاراضي زيارة بعد الحرب وراحت تشوف ارضها. كان موسم الزيتون على الابواب وكانت اراضيهم صارت تحت وصاية الدولة التي صارت تضمنها لمقاولين عرب لحصادها. اجت هالست بدها توخذ مقدار مرطبان من الزيتون من شجراتها، يعني قديش بده يبقى هذا : كيلو اثنين ثلاثة؟ مش اكثر..فشافها الرجل الذي تضمن الارض وصار يصرخ عليها واخذ من ايدها الزيتونات وزتهن على الارض

. هو من البلد؟ سألت

نعم هو عربي زيو زيك. وابوكي بيعرف مين هو. وأنا راح اوقف هون لانني اذا !بزيد راح تعرفي مين هو

The woman whose family owns these lands came for a first visit after the war, and then went to see her land. It was the olive harvest season and their lands were under the state's trusteeship, which had warranted it to Arab contractors to harvest. This lady wanted to take a jar of olives from her trees. How much would that be? One kilogram? Two? Three? No more. . . . The contractor saw her and lashed out at her, took the olives from her hands, and threw them on the ground.

Was it someone from our village? (I asked)

Yes, he's an Arab like you and me and your father knows him and I'll leave it at that, because you'll know who he is.

My father later told me the name of that person, a relative of mine I know very well, but what hurt me more is that this woman who was offended on her own land is the grandmother of my friend Amjad from Ramallah, who offered to take me to his family to listen to them tell their stories of the borders on the other side of my village.

This story shows that the borders not only complicated the residents' lifestyle, but also introduced discomfort and tension into what used to be a tight, intricate network of relationships. As the place transformed into two separate regions, binaries of "them" and "us," and "here" and "there" infiltrated people's vocabulary. Eventually, stories were told based on these new binaries, which after 1967 turned into the "Israeli Arab" and "West Bank Arab" identity binary.

Sami noted that initially his father didn't think that splitting the family in two to preserve its land and property would actually make their meetings difficult; however, meetings between family members gradually became harder. It was silly, as he says, to be accused of communicating with the enemy

whenever we were caught talking to my brother! Sami explained: “This is no joke. It actually happened. My brother was imprisoned because he met with us, on the basis of meeting with the enemy, and I myself was imprisoned many years in Jordan after I had been kidnapped from my home on the basis of collaborating with the Zionist enemy.”

STORIES NOT FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

كان مؤسس الدولة العبرية، دافيد بن غوريون، قد أعلن في أول كنيست شاركته في عضويتها -الكنيست الثانية في العام 1952 - عن دهشته من استمرار اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في اجتياز الحدود محاولين العودة إلى مدنهم وقراهم وبيوتهم وحقولهم، "مع أننا قال - نطلق الرصاص عليهم ونقتلهم".
فوجدتني أقاطعه باللغة العبرية لأول مرة في حياتي في الكنيست.
أجبتّه، مندهشاً أنا أيضاً : ألا تعرف معنى حب الوطن؟! ”

— إميل حبيبي، سراج الغولة: النص/ الوصية

In the second Knesset of 1952, the first Knesset in which I was a member, the founder of the Hebrew state, David Ben-Gurion, expressed his surprise at the continued efforts of the Palestinian refugees to cross the borders, trying to return to their cities, villages, homes, and fields, “even though,” he said, “we were shooting at them and killing them.” And so I interrupted him in Hebrew, for the first time during my time in the Knesset. I answered him, with the same surprise: “Don’t you know what the love of homeland is like?!”

—Imil Habibi, *The Ghoul’s Lamplight: The Text/The Will*

My grandfather differed from the other villagers in that he did not easily surrender to the borders. He refused to consider them as fateful. What he needed most was not his mother’s compassion, but tobacco rolling paper, which he used to buy from Tulkarm, the city where the residents of The Triangle used to go to buy their supplies. It was also my grandfather’s destination whenever he needed to buy home supplies and perform his Friday prayers. It was conveniently close to al-Marja, as only a few kilometers separated them. At the beginning, he sent my older uncles, who were still children back then—the eldest was ten and the second one was nine—to smuggle themselves into Shweika and then to Tulkarm to bring in the papers. Afterwards, he bought these papers from smugglers, who quickly became the “economic” link between the two areas, and sometimes even the “eyes” of the Israeli Intelligence, which allowed them to continue smuggling in return for watching over the borders and informing on “smugglers and infiltrators.”

The “infiltrators” were mostly family acquaintances, village residents, my parents, or the “smuggled” residents of the village, who crossed the partition line to communicate with their family or visit their lands. Israel named them

infiltrators to shroud their actions with an “illegal,” incriminating tone. As for the village residents, they called them the smuggled—that is, those who escaped the Jewish and Jordanian surveillance, which was considered a sign of risk-taking and a manipulation of security. It was always entertaining to hear my father tell, laughingly, of how my grandfather once told Um Ahmad, whom he saw coming from the eastern side in order to visit her mother on the western side, that the army was lurking on the way, and that she must wait. However, she refused to listen and didn’t even get rid of the sweets she had on her. When the soldiers saw her, asked for her papers, and demanded that she reveal what she was carrying, she cursed herself, saying: “I wish I had listened to Abu Abdullah’s advice.” *يا ريتني سمعت لأبو عبدالله* She almost got my grandfather imprisoned.

Evading the “watching” eye became a formative part of life at the borders, while the watching eyes of the villagers became their means to circumvent the borders and their agents. Abu Jalal, one of the villagers who worked in “smuggling” in the fifties, told me,

"بقيت مرة من المرات اهرب سكر لما لمحت دورية العسكر اليهود، فخفت انهم يمسكوني
عشان هيك خزقت شوال السكر وما وصلت عندهم والا الكيس فاضي، ولما سألوني شو معي
كان الكيس فاضي قلت لهم ولا اشئ وهيك نفدت من ورطة حتم."

Once I was smuggling sugar when I caught a glance of the Jewish military patrol. I was afraid they would catch me, and so I punched a hole in the bag. When they asked me what I was bringing in with me, the sugar bag was already empty, so I told them I didn’t have anything. And so I evaded a critical predicament.

Such predicaments became part of hanging on to the pre-partition life that the villagers were accustomed to; Um Ahmad wanted nothing but to visit her mother, but even this had become a dangerous “adventure.”

The desire to reunite with family on the other side was always on my grandfather’s mind. He was able to smuggle himself in a few times to visit his mother. My father says that in the beginning, my grandfather persevered in his visits to his parents, but those visits gradually became more difficult to carry out, and he started avoiding them, as the number of infiltration arrests rose.

One incident, however, turned the borders into a painful truth and an undeniable, hateful reality for my family. That was the “kidnapping” of my uncle in 1954 by the Jordanian forces, when he was barely thirteen. I have heard the details of this story tens of times. And despite the passage of half a century since this event, my grandmother still reminds us of the importance of discretion and secrecy regarding those details, insisting that we trust no one, as anyone could harm the family.

Samih al-Qasim wrote in his poem “Bats” about the fear and terror provoked by the eyes of the Israeli security, which watched people during the military rule. Here, bats are a metaphor for spying eyes:

الخفافيش على نافذتي،
تمتصُّ صوتي
الخفافيش على مدخل بيتي
والخفافيش وراء الصَّحف
في بعض الزوايا
تتقصَّى خطواتي
والتفاتي
والخفافيشُ على المقعد
.. في الشارع خلفي
وعلى واجهة الكُتب وسيقان الصَّبَايا
!كيف دارت نظراتي

Bats on my windows
suck in my words
Bats at the entrance to my house
behind newspaper, in corners
trail my footsteps,
observing every movement of my head
From the back of the chair, bats watch me
They trail me in the streets
watching my eyes pause
on books, on young girls' legs . . .
they watch and watch

Translated from Arabic by Nazih Kassis (*Sadder than Water*)

This fear of an existing but invisible “eye” turned conversations into whispers. My grandmother lowered her voice every time she spoke of “smuggled people,” of my uncle’s kidnapping, and her father’s perseverance at infiltration. This alert milieu made me feel all the more the importance of listening, even though I never felt bored listening to these stories and never doubted their “scoop.”

My grandmother relates that in 1954 my uncle was herding cows in the village fields, which, after the Rhodes Agreements, had become borderline lands. At that time, some Jordanian soldiers took him and his three cows, under the allegation that he had crossed the Armistice Line. He wasn’t alone then, but with his brother, who was three years younger, who ran to tell my grandfather and grandmother of the incident.

“What to do? What can we do?” my grandmother wondered, at a loss over how to retrieve her son. Then she started running around to all the houses of people known for their “intimate” connections with Israelis, and the houses of people known for their good relationship with Jordanians as well. But all her efforts were to no avail. My uncle disappeared and there was no

news of him for a few months, months she spent crying, wailing, and cursing time and its wrongdoings. My grandfather was required to visit the Israeli police station in Beit Lid on a daily basis, where he was held up for hours, "from morning till night," as my grandmother put it. They asked him: "Where is your son, who took him, and what do you know of him?" And of course, he had no answers. This went on for many months. One day, an Israeli officer told them that their son would come back the next day, with the cows, and that they should go pick him up at ten o'clock.

“We were so tense that night we couldn't sleep,” my grandmother told me. In the morning, my grandfather and uncle went to the set meeting point, where my uncle was supposed to be delivered by the Jordanians through the UN observers to the Israeli forces. And after hours of waiting, they brought in the cows without my uncle. My grandfather yelled: *انا بدي ابمي مش البقرات* “I want my son, not the cows,” but the officer told him: *هذا كل اللي عنا...بنعرفش اشني عن ابنك* “That's all we have. We know nothing about your son.”

“The news devastated me. . . . I lost hope and said that he was gone never to return,” my grandmother remembers, then sighs, and smiles:

بس بعد فترة اجاني مرسال ومعه صورة ابني وهو بلباس جندي في الجيش الاردني، قال لي انه ابني في امان تام وان نكون متاكدين انه مش راح يصيبه اشني وانه دخل عمدرسة عسكرية منشان امانه الشخصي. وثاللي المرسال اني لازم اوقف السؤال عنه

But afterwards, a messenger came to me and gave me a picture of my son, dressed in a Jordanian military uniform. He told me that my son was safe and sound and that I should trust that no harm would befall him. And that he was drafted into a military school in order to preserve his personal security. And that I should stop asking about him. My grandmother relaxed, knowing that at least he was all right!

Three years passed without my grandmother seeing my uncle, and she started to doubt that she was ever going to meet him. But one dark night, she was startled by the sound of light tapping on the window. That was my uncle, who “smuggled” himself in to see her. Naturally, her joy was mixed with fear for his life. No one could know of the visit, besides her, my grandfather, and elder uncles—that is, those who would undoubtedly keep this visit a secret. Discretion and secrecy were the most important tools to circumvent the “eyes” of the Jews, as my grandmother called them, and by that she meant the collaborators in the village:

That day I learned that the Jordanians had taken him in after they coordinated it with some of the village residents who were on good terms with my uncle. They did it so that he could “inform” them of the names of people who “infiltrated” from the Arab side (Jordanian) to the Israeli side in return, and then they would meet with the Jews.

"يومها بس عرفت ان الاردنيون اخذوه بعد ما رتبوا الموضوع مع ناس من البلد اللي كانلهم معهم علاقات منيحة ، واخذوه عشان "يبلغهم" بأسامي الناس اللي بقوا يتهربوا "من عند العرب (الجانب الاردني) لهون عشان يلتقوا مع اليهود".

My uncle says that he turned in the names of thirteen people, some of whom were imprisoned for life and some of whom miraculously escaped execution. Of course, the Israelis found out about my uncle. He became wanted and couldn't go back to live in his mother's house. And so my uncle became an excellent infiltrator, and my grandfather's house turned into a smuggling factory. Sometimes my grandfather infiltrated to meet his mother, other times his mother infiltrated to meet him, while in one instance his brothers infiltrated for a family visit, and in another, my uncle infiltrated to communicate with the family.

It was ironic to see relationships resume their normalcy after the war of 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza and dismantled the borders that have been “crossing” the Palestinians in the last two decades. Ironically, through the occupation, families could meet up in a “legal way,” even though it was an illegitimate act. This was the case for almost twenty years, until the first intifada broke out in 1987 and restrictions were again put on movement and mobility, culminating in the building of the apartheid wall.

Stories of infiltration would not have left such a mark on me had they not been accompanied by the borderline landscape and its eternal mystery. I was born in 1971, four years after the occupation of the West Bank, and as such, after the place lost its official “awe.” On the eastern side of the border—that is, on its Jordanian side (the “Arab side” in my village's vocabulary)—and a few meters away from it were the ruins of a house, next to which two tall palm trees stood high. The ruined house, with its thick, large walls and traditional stone, surrounded by a deadened silence, was the remains of Haj Youssef's house. Its residents left in the mid-fifties and moved into Deir el-Ghusun. A widespread story relates how the residents fled after a strange incident took place. One day in the early 1950s, one of the family members, Sumayya, a young woman in her early twenties, noticed a man wearing Arab attire following her cousin. So she followed him and saw him draw his gun and point

it at her cousin. She picked up a large stone and beat him to death with it. It later appeared that the man wearing the Arab attire was a Jewish officer disguised as an Arab. To avoid a series of disasters that would most certainly afflict her, the family quickly escaped the house.

At the border, stories of forsaken houses mixed with stories of people I know nothing of besides their names, and stories of foreign officers wearing local village attire.

I was ten when I first visited the ruins. Naturally, I went there with another group of children around my age. And even though much time has passed since then, I am still able to remember how awestruck and bedazzled I was at the sight of the house tiles, the Za'atar planter, the two palm trees, the grapevines and high walls, and the sky. But what I remember in detail, and what terrified me most, was that the house, whose ceiling had collapsed or been destroyed, was still clean! Entering the ruins of a forsaken house is like entering the Ghoul's house in folktales; it both tempts and terrifies you. And even though we were children, we still knew that we were entering a house that had landlords, and that we were trespassing in a space not ours. Entering this house and discovering its cleanliness intensified those feelings of awe. As for me, being ten years old, it occurred to me that the homeowners were ghosts and that I was violating a sacred space. I couldn't help but summon my mother's stories about the house of the Ghoul who ate children.

I ran along with the rest, terrified. We ran between the trees and jumped over the rocks and in between the olive trees until we reached the other side of the border, close to our house!

Today, all this seems explicable and entertaining. Clearly, one of the former homeowners had been returning to the house every now and then to clean it! It is safe to assume that one of the landowners was taking care of the olive groves that surrounded the house, as could be deduced from comparing it to other neglected groves! Shadows guard the houses. . . . That was my presumption, and there I confirmed it!

Neither at the age of ten nor later could I imagine those moments of infiltration and the sensation that accompanied them. For instance, did the infiltrator feel fear or challenge? Did he feel adventurous? How exactly did he feel? I might never know exactly how my grandfather felt as he hid in the shadows of the olive and almond trees. I might never know how my grandmother felt as she opened the door and quickly let her son in before he could be seen by anyone. What is certain, however, is that these stories of infiltration, told in every house of the village, in which members of our community were so resourceful and so often heroic, fascinated me much more than stories of Shater Hassan and Little Red Riding Hood.

Abu Ahmad, for example, was an economic infiltrator who smuggled goods such as eggs, tobacco, sugar, and salt from Jordan into the Arab villages in Israel. Abu Umar was a political infiltrator, for he broadcast the news of the Israelis to the Jordanian side, while Abu Ali (my father's grandfather) was a domestic infiltrator, as he infiltrated the borders on a weekly basis to visit his wife, who was living on the other side. As for my father, he was just an "ordinary" infiltrator: he would smuggle to the other side, following his father's orders, once to help his grandfather cross from the other side, and once to help bring in a bonesetter to treat a cousin with a broken leg. These various types of infiltrations continued until surveillance became extremely strict and brutal.

My village's border stories revolve around infiltrations, and its infiltration stories revolve around recapturing the "ordinary" and mundane ways of living that, hindered by the borders, became extraordinary. There is nothing more mundane than bringing in a doctor from a nearby village or bringing eggs from a nearby city; and of course, there is nothing more normal than a mother visiting her son or a husband his family. Once upon a border, the mundane and the heroic were one and the same; listening to these stories, we can retrieve their heroism for times present as well as past.



The separation fence, partially resembling the 1949 armistice line, as seen from my family balcony in al-Marja in 2014 (photo © copyright and used by permission of the author).

NOTES

1. My interviews were of course in Arabic; the translations in this article are my own.
2. Naksa is an Arabic term meaning setback, and is specifically used to refer to the 1967 defeat of the Arab countries in the war with Israel, and to the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai, and Golan Heights.
3. To see the full text of Resolution 181, see United Nations, "Resolution."
4. Why did the Palestinians fail and the Jews prevail? This question still calls for much additional research, but for an introduction to the issues of the power structure, see Pappé, Abu Sitta, and W. Khalidi.
5. To view the armistice agreements in Hebrew, see Israel; in English, see United States.
6. Abdullah El-Tell, a Jordanian military leader and the commander of the Jerusalem battle in 1948, describes the surrender of the Triangle. He was close to King Abdullah, and was aware of the communication between the King and the Israelis. In *The Catastrophe of Palestine*, he documents the development of that communication before the war and during the Rhodes talks; for the Triangle talks, see 487–544.
7. Um el-Abed, along with other women from the village, I noticed, would use the term "Jewish Druze" to identify the Druze soldiers who served in the Israeli army, even though Druze are a Palestinian minority. It seems that what determined identity for Um el-Abed was the relationship to the Zionist enterprise and its contingent role, as Druze identity specifically, and human identity in general, is determined by performance and practice.
8. It is important to note here that after the second intifada, Israel referred to a Palestinian present within the borders of "Israel" without a permit as *shabach* [unlawful stayer], and thus the shabach inherited the infiltrator's role. The storyteller changed, but the "borders" remained the centerpiece of the stories.

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