

Stories About Individuals and Villages

Previous chapters focused on the experiences of Palestinians who remained in Haifa and the Galilee. This chapter delves into the events in the Triangle villages and the city of Jaffa, as told by the original residents—later known as the “present absentees.” By refusing those villagers permission to return to their depopulated villages, the state opened up opportunities to take control of their lands and to settle Jews in their place. Yet three villages escaped that fate: ‘Ilabun, ‘Illut, and Kufr Qari’. Their return to their homes is in contrast to the cruel fate of villagers of Iqrit and Kufr Bir‘im and other depopulated villages, recounted in the previous chapter. This chapter also presents individuals’ distinctive narratives about the events which overtook them, revealing very personal perspectives of the Nakba—rich material for an engrossing future film or novel. Too little attention has been given to the human lives affected by the Palestinian tragedy of 1948 and its aftermath; we and the world need to become more acquainted with it.

Most Palestinian stories have to do with their social ties (and at times their familial ties) being severed after the armistice agreement lines were drawn. These new borders, which often ruptured relations among members of the same family, were not immediately recognized, and for several years people would undertake great risks to cross them. Life under the control of the military government, which was responsible for imposing the new reality on the population, became a Kafkaesque theater in which the scripts of the plays were leavened with fear for those who were missing and joy at encountering loved ones. The stories of some inhabitants of border villages in the Triangle represented a new kind of human suffering—the ramifications of disrupted relations between relatives separated by the new border—recently exposed and documented by the researcher Honaida Ghanim.¹

The stories of the Triangle residents represent a new stage in the struggle to survive inside Israel. Several small villages were destroyed and their inhabitants dispersed, and thousands of those who had sought refuge in those villages (such as

Baqa al-Gharbiyya) were also uprooted. At the end of the period of transition from Arab rule to Israeli control in the spring of 1949, villages in the area in close proximity to the Jordanian border endured a series of retaliatory operations by Israel in what became known as “the border war” in which thousands of Palestinians were wounded or killed. The conditions of constant tension left their imprint on the population: villages in the Triangle witnessed a steady series of acts of killing and maltreatment for seven years, which were to climax in the Kafr Qasim Massacre (29 October 1956).²

THE TRANSFER OF THE TRIANGLE TO ISRAELI CONTROL

In early 1949, while Israel was preventing the return of refugees and expelling—under the pretext of “security needs”—thousands of those who had remained along its borders, it was also negotiating with Jordan on transferring the border villages of the Triangle to Israeli control. This contradiction in Israeli policy was never seriously discussed either by the government or in the press, even in opposition party organs. The Mapam party, for instance, continued to attack the government for accepting that the West Bank should remain under King Abdullah’s control. As for the proposal that Israel accept 100,000 refugees to facilitate solving the refugee problem, the leftist opposition mounted fierce criticism against the government and accused it of bowing to American pressure. Maki’s position on these issues was not much different from Mapam’s at the time. After King Abdullah submitted to Israeli pressure and accepted the transfer of the Triangle to Israeli control, there was no criticism of the government nor was there any opposition from the leftist parties.

Much has been said and written about Jordan’s transfer of the Triangle region to Israel. Abdullah al-Tal set aside a whole chapter in his memoirs to discuss “the tragedy of the Triangle.”³ Nevertheless, the facts surrounding the surrender of the villages of the Triangle to Israeli control remain shrouded in secrecy. The transfer was the best evidence of the rapaciousness of the victor and the limp determination of the Jordanian king. On the other hand, the Palestinians, being powerless, were the hapless victims in this equation. The fate of the Palestinians became a football in the hands of local and international powers and governments, with no consideration given to their opinion. Thus, the population of Wadi ‘Ara and a border strip extending as far south as Kafr Qasim, were transferred to Israel and “peacefully” joined the remaining Arabs in northern and southern Israel.

‘Arif al-‘Arif, whose writings on the Nakba are distinguished by their substance and balance, abandoned his silence to write about the deception practiced by the Israeli side in the annexation of the Triangle to its territory.⁴ His criticism, in which he goes as far as accusing all those from the Jordanian side who participated in the surrender of that region of treason, is surprising and audacious. Under the

title “The Rhodes Agreement and the Tragedy of the Triangle,” he wrote in detail about the types of maps used and how they were exploited by the Israeli side. The issue was discussed by the Jordanian parliament in 1953, and MPs representing West Bank cities placed the blame squarely on the ministers and the prime minister.⁵ Despite this strong criticism no one was held accountable for the negotiating failure and the calamity which cost tens of thousands of dunums of land. (A dunum is 1,000 square meters). The documents related to the Triangle transfer agreement and its implementation on the ground are still not available to researchers, like many other sensitive issues related to Israel’s relations with King Abdullah before and after the Nakba.

The armistice agreement between Jordan and Israel, which was signed on 3 April 1949, included a number of amendments to the cease-fire lines between the two sides, the most important of which was the transfer of the Triangle villages to Israeli control.⁶ The Jordanians, the British, and other international parties feared that Israel might expel the population of the Triangle, as it had done with some of those who remained in the Galilee, so they repeatedly asked for written and verbal commitment that Israel would respect the rights of the inhabitants of the region. Consequently the signed agreement for the transfer of the Triangle included clear commitments that the villagers’ rights to their land and property would not be violated.⁷ While Israel respected most of these commitments, it interpreted them in a narrow way so that most of the original inhabitants of the Triangle (31,000) continued to live in their villages after they were transferred to Israeli sovereignty in May 1949, but thousands of refugees in Baqa al-Gharbiyya and other small villages were expelled in one way or the other.

The Triangle is a small strip of territory fifty kilometers long running from Kafr Qasim in the south to Megiddo in the north, and only five kilometers wide. The Triangle included twenty-seven villages, large and small, and a number of smaller hamlets (*khirab*). Israel considered this area, particularly the northern section, to be strategically important since it was the main transportation route connecting the coast with the northern and eastern parts of the Galilee. Jordan consented to Israel’s demand to transfer the Triangle without consulting the population or even informing them beforehand. This was how the strip was added to Israeli territory after the end of hostilities, significantly increasing the number of Israel’s Arab inhabitants in the middle of the country. This step demonstrated the contradictions in Israel’s policy which made every effort to shrink the number of remaining Arabs at the same time it sought to annex a region inhabited by tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Some residents of the Triangle who wrote their memoirs about those days (April–May 1949) described a feeling of tension and foreboding about the transfer of their area to Israeli sovereignty.⁸ It became evident quickly that their fears had not been misplaced, for the staff of the military government for the southern villages of the Triangle violated the terms of the armistice by confiscating and

plundering thousands of dunums of land belonging to al-Tira and Qalansuwa villages and imposing a permanent nightly curfew on the inhabitants of the region. The soldiers and police were allowed to do what they liked, irrespective of the agreement. Most members of the police in the area were Circassians and Druze who had fought alongside Israel in 1948, and were later mobilized after the war. Their officer in the village of Qalansuwa was a Circassian called Idris Bakir, and he and his unit treated the inhabitants violently and contemptuously, according to the testimony of one of the villagers.⁹

The transfer of control over the villages of the southern Triangle began in early May 1949, according to the quasi-official *al-Yawm* newspaper, which exaggerated the happiness of the villagers on the occasion. The paper added that the inhabitants could have left their villages and moved to an area under Arab rule, but they chose to stay in their villages.¹⁰ The villagers of Kafr Qasim were the first to be transferred to the Israeli side, on Friday, 6 May, “and the reception of the population for the Israeli army was great, beyond all expectations.” The paper put out similar propaganda writing about the arrival of the military governor in al-Tira being celebrated by the villagers and the mukhtar with “great enthusiasm.”¹¹ In Qalansuwa, which had about 2,000 inhabitants, the mukhtar, ‘Abd al-Hamid Faris al-Natur, gave a speech in Hebrew expressing the relief of the residents at being liberated from the Iraqis and the Jordanians.¹² The paper reported similar signs of happiness and contentment at the entry of the Israeli government into the area of Wadi ‘Ara, from Kufr Qari’ to Umm al-Fahm.

The inhabitants of the Triangle feared for their future under Israeli rule, but like all people who come under occupation, they “rejoiced” over their new rulers. Defenseless citizens who come under the control of their enemies with a fearsome reputation often go too far in the effort to earn the satisfaction of the occupiers so as to protect their lives and their survival in place. That was natural, even though the agreement between Jordan and Israel included commitments to protect the citizens and their property, and mentioned the creation of an Arab police force to maintain law and order in the Arab villages.¹³ Indeed, an Arab police unit was formed at the beginning, but the entire area was quickly placed under Israeli military rule, and there was no further mention of that unit. The inhabitants suffered from repression, maltreatment, curfews, and other forms of harassment because of the proximity of their villages to the Jordanian border. All in all, Israel annexed the population of the Triangle in an atmosphere dominated by fear and trepidation.

Israel’s narrow interpretation of the articles of agreement concerning protecting the inhabitants and their rights excluded the territory west of the cease-fire line.¹⁴ Most of those considered to be refugees were expelled during the first few months of coming under Israeli military rule. Estimates of those who were expelled and forced to migrate from the Triangle vary between 4,000 and 8,500 individuals.¹⁵ In addition, the remaining inhabitants of smaller villages were uprooted, and the state took control over their lands. In that period, the massacres of the year of the

Nakba were still weighing on people's minds, so the blows they received were tolerated, compared to the great fear which accompanied the transfer of the region to Israeli control. Those who most feared Israeli retaliation were villagers who had participated in battles with nearby settlements, such as al-Tira.

Israel began expulsion operations from the small *khirab* late in 1949. The military governor, Emmanuel Moore (Markovsky), informed officials that by March 1950 the remaining population of twenty small villages and farms had been forced to migrate.¹⁶ The uprooting operations did not provoke much resistance or even wide condemnation among the population. The communists were at the forefront of the critics of the expulsions and forced migrations. In February 1951, *al-Ittihad* wrote about the expulsion of the inhabitants of the villages of al-Bayada, 'Ayn al-Sahla, 'Ayn al-Zaytuna, 'Ayn Jarrar, and others in Wadi 'Ara: "The army surrounded the villages at night, and forced women and children to move to Umm al-Fahm using force and violence."¹⁷ Nearly one month after this news report, MK Tawfiq Tubi asked the defense minister a list of questions in the Knesset concerning those small villages, numbering thirteen, which had been subjected to expulsion.

As was the case with expulsion operations elsewhere in the Galilee, the population transfer in the Triangle took place in many cases without legal basis, even given the Israeli understanding of things. That is what happened to the inhabitants of the hamlet of al-Jalama who were expelled from their village in 1950. They hired attorney Muhammad Nimr al-Hawwari and went to court in January 1952, asking to be allowed to return to their homes. Attempts at a solution outside court failed, so the Supreme Court issued a final judgment ordering governmental institutions to "use all means at their disposal to return the situation to its prior status."¹⁸ The proceedings of the Supreme Court revealed some details of the tragedy that befell this village: the residents testified that the authorities had forced them out of their homes and their village on 2 March 1950, expelled them from their lands, and settled them in the village of Jatt. All of these actions had been the result of directives from the military governor of the village of Baqa al-Gharbiyya.

The attorney for the defendants, Miriam Ben-Porat, said that "a kibbutz had been established on the lands of the plaintiffs and its residents are unwilling to move from the land voluntarily; and the authorities cannot force them to do that according to the law." The court replied to this claim in an unusually strongly worded statement: "The basic sense of justice rebels at hearing this claim, that the armed forces authorities cannot remove the kibbutz from the land on which it was set up." The court added in astonishment: "When the inhabitants were illegally expelled from their lands, the defendants did not trouble to check if the law allowed them to do what they did. And now that they have to repair the injustice done to the plaintiffs, they find the law has become an obstacle before them."¹⁹

On this basis, the Supreme Court decided, "We have no choice except to change the temporary order into a final and permanent one in its first section, i.e., concerning the defendants, who are required not to put any obstacles in the way of the

return of the plaintiffs to their village and their lands.” However, the members of kibbutz Lehavot Haviva, who had been living on the lands of the village since 1951, blew up the houses of al-Jalama with the help of the army on 11 August 1953, using force to prevent the carrying out of the decision by the Supreme Court. The members of that kibbutz came from Czechoslovakia and were members of the Zionist socialist Hashomer Hatzair. They conspired with the military authorities to steal the lands of the Palestinians, even in the rare case when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of others.²⁰

The village of al-Jalama joined in the fate of its fellow villages, Iqrit and Kufr Bir‘im, along the Lebanese border, where the army also blew up the houses and prevented the families from returning, despite court decisions to the contrary. The echoes of the al-Jalama tragedy reached the Arabic and Hebrew language press. The church-affiliated *al-Rabita* magazine carried the news of how the village houses were destroyed in spite of the Supreme Court ruling, and then added in its commentary: “The Rhodes agreement too should have protected the inhabitants of the village from this unjust action. . . . Where are the commitments? Where are the signed agreements?”²¹ The mukhtar of the village, Muhammad Naddaf, who lost his house (and before that 4,500 olive trees had been uprooted from his land), sent a letter to the prime minister on 11 August 1953, in which he said: “The court ruled in our favor,” but the authorities had supported the aggressors and criminals. “Is this a state or a gang?” he asked, and concluded his letter by saying: “Kill us. We are tired of life under your tyranny. I am now eighty years old, and I have not seen worse oppression and injustice than yours. Pay for my property or kill me so that I may have some rest. I [will] complain to God about you.”²²

THE RETURN OF THE INHABITANTS OF ‘ILABUN, ‘ILLUT, AND KUFR QARI’

Contrary to the case of the villagers of ‘Illut and ‘Ilabun, the Israeli army did not expel the inhabitants of the village of Kufr Qari’ directly; they moved to a neighboring village in Wadi ‘Ara following a bloody encounter in which their houses became a battlefield for eleven months. They returned to their village on the eve of the transfer of the Triangle to Israeli control, with the tacit approval of the authorities. In the case of ‘Illut, the majority of its inhabitants were refugees in Nazareth for a year and a half (as of July 1948) but they returned to their village and homes at the beginning of 1950, unlike the inhabitants of most neighboring Galilee villages. We have already seen the first part of the story of ‘Ilabun—the massacre, the expulsion of the population, and their travel to Lebanon. In this section, we present the second part concerning the return of the inhabitants to their village, which was depopulated during most of 1949.

There are similarities as well as differences among the cases of the three villages. The inhabitants of Kufr Qari’ were the first to leave their homes in May 1948, and

they returned later without the official approval of the Israeli authorities in April 1949. The residents of 'Illut, who experienced two massacres in which dozens of martyrs were killed in July 1948, were forced by the Israeli army to migrate and seek refuge. Some went to Nazareth where they found shelter in monasteries, but others went further and reached Syria and Lebanon. The story of the return of the people of 'Illut to their homes a year and a half later with the approval of the Israeli authorities is unique among similar villages of "present absentees." The same could be said of the villagers of 'Ilabun who were expelled by the Israeli army to Lebanon. Israel later approved their return (quietly, without much noise) near the end of 1948, so that by the summer of 1949 the vast majority had returned.

The Return of the Villagers of 'Ilabun

Some residents of 'Ilabun had left the village before the Israeli army entered it on 30 October 1948. Some young men who hid in the mountains tried to return to the village after the massacre and the expulsion of the population, and some of them found a place to hide in the house of the priest, Murqus Yuhanna al-Mu'allim, and in other houses.²³ The return of those young men was a huge gamble which only a few were willing to risk. However, the 'Ilabun villagers whom Israel expelled to Lebanon refused to accept that their fate was to live in the diaspora and were active at various levels to ensure their return to their homes. No doubt the main factor responsible for their return was the quick action taken by the clergymen in the village, who contacted several local and international parties to ensure the villagers' return. Those clergymen succeeded in gaining wide sympathy and support in dealing with the tragedy that had befallen the village, which greatly embarrassed the Israeli government at a time when it was in dire need of the support of Western states. Within Israel itself, minister Bechor Shitrit acted quickly, in cooperation with various Israeli parties, to guarantee a solution to the problem.²⁴

On Saturday 20 November 1948, Mikha'il Damuni and Butrus Shukri Matta carried a letter from the priest Murqus to the 'Ilabun villagers in Lebanon telling them to return quickly to their village. Many villagers were afraid to return, as if the aftereffects of the shock and the tragedy they had endured just a few weeks earlier still had a hold on them, but some chose the risk, and the return journey to the village began on 22 November.²⁵

The tragedy of the 'Ilabun villagers did not end with their return to their homes, as they found them stripped of all their contents.²⁶ The organized looting included the theft of hundreds of cows, goats, sheep, and donkeys which the army and the authorities took as war prizes, and also furniture, clothing, and stores of grain, oil, and olives. The villagers heard from the priest and some elderly people who had not been expelled that soldiers and civilians had searched the houses and loaded their contents on trucks. All attempts by the villagers to get back the looted items, or at least to be paid compensation, failed but they did receive help from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Middle East and from

the residents of neighboring Arab villages. This assistance helped them to rebuild their lives in their village.²⁷ Next was the struggle over the land, which many Zionist organizations had wanted to loot as the property of “present absentees,” but the villagers determinedly went back to planting their land as in the past. Thus, normal life gradually returned to the village, but the massacre and the expulsion of the population with unparalleled cruelty remained engraved in the memories of the villagers for many years.

The events of the Nakba in ‘Ilabun, whether the massacre, the expulsion of the population, or the return of the inhabitants to the village, have received brief and not very accurate treatment in Israeli historical research literature. As with other war crimes committed by the army in 1948 and later, Israeli authorities imposed a blackout about the events and related documents. Although Minister Shitrit, as the representative of the Israeli government, reached a consensual agreement with the representatives of the villagers which secured their quiet and gradual return, the details of that agreement have remained secret, which is consistent with other attempts to bury embarrassing criminal operations. The consent of the authorities to the return of the inhabitants of ‘Ilabun to their lands, and the fact that those lands were not expropriated in accordance with Israeli policy and law, constitutes a special and particular case. The attempt to quickly fix what the Israeli army had done took place essentially to relieve the pressure on the government and its institutions by local and international representatives of the church. Thus the ‘Ilabun villagers benefited from the great embarrassment that their tragedy caused the authorities, by being allowed to return to their homes from the diaspora, including hundreds who had not been expelled by the army but had left on their own.

One of these returnees in December 1948 was Fawzi al-Zayna, who related what happened to him on his return journey with dozens of ‘Ilabun villagers on Christmas Eve.²⁸ He said they were set upon by bandits near the Lebanese border, and split into two groups. In many cases, soldiers were lying in wait for the returnees from Lebanon near Sa‘sa‘ and confronted them, but they permitted the ‘Ilabun villagers to proceed on their way after checking their identity. The group that returned on Christmas Eve included Khalil Salim Matar, who said that three brigades had attacked his group of friends: “They made us sit on the muddy ground and ordered us to raise our hands above our heads.” Matar also spoke of being interrogated by the soldiers and their attempts to intimidate the members of the group and to rob them before they left them and went on their way.²⁹ The group continued walking until they reached Hurfaysh. “One of the villagers accompanied us. He asked us for two lira, which we gave him, although had he asked for five lira we would not have begrudged him that. Then we continued on our way and reached ‘Ilabun on 24 December 1948, Christmas Eve.”³⁰

Mu‘in Salim Zurayq told the story of his return with his brother from Junya, north of Beirut, to ‘Ilabun. After he heard about the return of many villagers, he decided in mid-February to join them. Mu‘in returned with his brother Munir,

their sister Nayfa, and her three children, who were accompanied by Rashid Ayyub al-Zayna. When they reached Rumaysh, Elias Samara from the village of al-Rama joined them. They hired the services of a guide from Dayr al-Qasi and began on their way in the evening. When they crossed the asphalt road running along the border, they fell into a trap set by the Israeli army. Some of the soldiers spoke Arabic. "They took us to Hurfaysh, then to 'Akka," he said. The following day members of the 'Ilabun group along with other detainees were taken to Haifa, from there to the Austrian hospital in Nazareth, then to 'Afula, and then the caravan headed in the direction of Umm al-Fahm. "Halfway between 'Afula and al-Lajjun they told us to get off and chased us in the direction of Jenin, firing in the air behind us so that we would not think of returning."³¹

Testimonies from Mu'in Zurayq and other 'Ilabun villagers concerning the difficulties they endured on the road to exile and back were collected by the village historian in his book *The Nakba in 'Ilabun*.³² I heard some of these stories from the villagers when I visited 'Ilabun and met a number of eyewitnesses ten years after Elias Surur's book was published. But some of those whom Surur had interviewed had passed away by 2008. Thus, the book *Al-Nakba in 'Ilabun* and other similar books and documentary films saved the testimonies of many villagers for history.

The villagers of 'Ilabun continued their unorganized and gradual return over the spring of 1949. Some returned from Lebanon thanks to an agreement between Yehushua Palmon, the prime minister's advisor, and Bishop Hakim.³³ That agreement secured the return of hundreds of Christians from Lebanon to the villages of the Galilee in return for the bishop's cooperation with Israel and its policies. However, Benny Morris's statement that hundreds of 'Ilabun's inhabitants returned to their village following that agreement is not accurate, because the majority of the 'Ilabun villagers had returned by May 1949, that is, before the deal with the bishop. This is a certainty, well supported by the villagers' testimonies and written sources. Those who returned after the deal with the bishop were no more than several dozen. One of the last groups to return from Lebanon included Faris Salim Matar and his family at the beginning of January 1950.³⁴

The events of the Nakba in 'Ilabun left an impact on the villagers for many years. Those who returned to that Galilee village went into mourning for over a year, during which weddings were not celebrated nor were the feasts and seasonal holidays.³⁵ After their return, the villagers (particularly the women) fell into the habit of visiting cemeteries and recalling the martyrs of the massacre before attending prayers in church. People in neighboring villages came to look on the 'Ilabun villagers as a symbol of resistance to injustice and forced migration at the hands of the Israeli army. Some young men from the village became famous for their political activity and for joining the Communist Party. The primary concern of the people of 'Ilabun turned to the struggle to free the dozens of prisoners in Israeli detention centers. When they were released in May 1949 the village held a special celebration for the occasion and the participants visited the graves of the

martyrs who had been murdered by the soldiers of the Golani Brigade at the end of October 1948. Later, Habib Zurayq spoke to the villagers, memorializing the massacre and the suffering of the people of 'Ilabun over the previous six months.³⁶

Despite their many tragedies, the 'Ilabun villagers were relatively fortunate in being allowed to return to their village. The theft of the property of the Arabs remaining in the Galilee has received little mention in published research. Many of the returnees and forced migrants told stories about Israeli soldiers stealing what little money or jewels they had had on them. State institutions themselves had organized the collection of "abandoned property" belonging to Palestinians in their cities and villages. The theft and plundering of property was total in cities and villages which were completely depopulated. 'Ilabun was a distinct case. Within weeks after their expulsion at the end of October 1948, they returned to find their houses totally empty of all contents. In addition to the testimonies of the returning villagers, the testimony of the clergy, one of whom chronicled the events in his diaries,³⁷ also bears witness.

The Departure and Return of the Kufr Qari' Villagers

The location of Kufr Qari' at the western entrance to Wadi 'Ara was of great strategic importance and made it a target of occupation. On 9 May 1948, soldiers of the Alexandroni Brigade attacked the village and managed to occupy part of it, expelling most of the villagers from their homes. Dozens of the inhabitants of Kufr Qari', armed with rifles and aided by temporary armed support from dozens of neighboring villages, managed to repulse the attack and caused a number of casualties on the other side, which is what prevented the fall of the entire village that day.³⁸ Sara Osetski-Lazar, who researched the events at Kufr Qari' and listened to testimonies of the villagers which complemented army documents, concluded that the attack on the village was halted with the help of ARA Iraqi volunteers, but the inhabitants subsequently decided to leave their homes to escape further danger.³⁹

Following that assault, Kufr Qari' became a deserted village and a kind of no man's zone: the western side controlled by Israeli forces and the eastern side by Iraqi-Jordanian forces. Some villagers who had planted in winter tried to harvest them, but landmines placed by the Israelis and gunfire prevented them. When a rumor reached the expelled villagers of Kufr Qari' that the Jews were harvesting their crops, one villager said he went out to the fields with a friend to see if this was true, and "indeed, we saw harvesting machines at work in our fields, so we fired at them from afar, and they returned fire. When the other villagers heard the gunfire they joined us along with some residents of neighboring villages who came to our rescue, at which point the Jews fled to the Gil'ed settlement."⁴⁰ But the soldiers of the ARA, fearing that the situation would deteriorate into a major conflagration, calmed the villagers and took them from their houses in the village to Wadi 'Ara.

More than one researcher has listened to the testimonies of the Kufr Qari' villagers and documented those testimonies in their studies.⁴¹ The narratives portray

a clear picture of events, and show that the villagers were going back and forth to their houses and their fields to gather provisions or to plow and plant. For those *fellahin*, the act of going back was fraught with danger, and some were killed or wounded by gunfire or Israeli mines.⁴² Despite the danger, the inhabitants kept alive their relations with the village, which in the end helped them to return to their homes. The villagers of Kufr Qari' had learned the lesson of dispossession from the experiences of other Palestinians who were uprooted and then lost contact with their homes: their houses were destroyed and all traces lost with time. Since Israeli soldiers had not occupied the entire village, the inhabitants were able to maintain connection with their village throughout their forced migration (eleven months) and took the courageous decision to return in April 1949, on the eve of the transfer of the Triangle region to Israeli control.

More than one source indicates that Hasan 'Isa 'Athamna played an important role in the return of the villagers. He led a delegation of notables from the village to the nearby kibbutz Kfar Glickson to secure a ceasefire agreement between the two sides, after which the inhabitants of Kufr Qari' returned to their village and their homes in April 1949.⁴³ When it was time for the villages of Wadi 'Ara to be transferred to Israeli control, the villagers had already returned under their own power. That timely and unusual initiative saved Kufr Qari' from destruction. Days later, the correspondent of *al-Yawm* reported the transfer of the villages of Wadi 'Ara to the Israeli side and the ceremony of raising the Israeli flag over the main traffic circle at the entrance of Umm al-Fahm.⁴⁴

Were local initiatives and good neighborly relations the secret of the return of the Kufr Qari' villagers? Did the Israeli government and army turn a blind eye and allow Arab and Jewish neighbors to reach an agreement so as not to compromise the major agreement with Jordan? There are no clear answers yet to these and similar questions provided in documents from Israeli archives or other official sources. The testimonies which authenticate what happened in the field come mainly from the Arab side, most notably from the Kufr Qari' villagers who relayed their stories to researchers. The story of this village—well known to its inhabitants and their neighbors in Wadi 'Ara—is absent from the collective memory in other areas of Palestine. It has been relatively fortunate in garnering the attention of researchers, and is mentioned here in order to place it in the general framework of events of the year of the Nakba.

The Expulsion and Return of the Villagers of 'Illut

'Illut and other villages in the Nazareth district were occupied during the ten-day battles in July 1948. We mentioned earlier that Nazareth and most villages in its district were not subjected to massacres and expulsions by the Israeli army. However, 'Illut was among the exceptions, one of four villages where inhabitants were forced to migrate and join the thousands of forced migrants or refugees who became known as the "present absentees." The other three villages in the district

which were depopulated were Saffuriyya, al-Mujaydil and Ma'lul in Marj ibn 'Amir. Most of 'Illut's expelled residents found refuge and a place to live in the city of the Annunciation at the Salesian monastery. Other refugees also lived in that monastery, next to the monks who had great difficulty taking in hundreds of refugees. Luckily for them, the Israeli authorities allowed the residents of 'Illut to return to their village in the end.

The story of the uprooting of the inhabitants of 'Illut began on 16 July 1948, when soldiers from the Golani Brigade attacked the village from the west and the south. The soldiers ordered all the inhabitants to gather in the courtyard near the mosque, men on one side, women on the other. The soldiers found arms in some houses, whereupon they blew them up. Such was the fate of the house of mukhtar Hasan Muhammad al-Ahmad and three other houses in 'Illut.⁴⁵ An officer by the name of Nassim led a group of young men to an olive grove and "he made them stand in a single line, then the machinegun on the officer's car mowed them down within minutes." The sixteen martyrs of this massacre were Sa'id Abu Ras, Taha Abu Ayyash, Muhammad 'Awdatallah, Sa'id al-Fallah, Muhammad Mustafa al-'Isa, Muhammad Ibrahim, Nimr al-Dabburi, Muhammad al-Fayiz, Ahmad Muhammad Abu Ras, Salih Muhammad, Nayif al-Salti, Hasan Muhammad al-Darwish, Mahmud Salim al-'Ali, Mir'i Husayn Mahmud, Mustafa Salim Abu Tanha, and Muhammad Salim Shehada. Two others were wounded but recovered later: Muhammad Mustafa al-Ma'mur and Khadr 'Ali Yusif Abu Ras.⁴⁶

Soldiers of the Golani Brigade who had perpetrated the massacre continued on their way to 'Ayn al-Bayda, where a number of villagers were hiding. Their fate was similar to the others who were executed in cold blood; ten 'Illut villagers were killed near the spring. Some villagers who heard the gunfire arrived at the scene, collected the bodies, and buried them near the mosque. After the perpetration of these two massacres of dozens of men, two weeks later the soldiers returned and imposed a curfew on the village; they proceeded to loot the houses and the school, stealing furniture, horses, beehives, and dozens of heads of cattle. After that operation the majority of the population went to Nazareth,⁴⁷ leaving no one in the village except for a few elderly people.

As in other Palestinian cities and villages, the Israeli authorities managed to suppress the news of the massacre and expulsion of the population. The villagers of 'Illut acquiesced to this conspiracy of silence out of fear of retribution by the government and the army, particularly as they were allowed to return to their homes after a year and a half. Most historians and researchers have shown no interest in 'Illut's experiences and most Israeli historical literature has been silent on the topic, including the new revisionist historians. Benny Morris, for example, referred to the fact that 'Illut became an abandoned village, but he did not explain to his readers the circumstances that led to the migration of the villagers.⁴⁸ Ilan Pappé, in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, also fails to mention the two massacres and the expulsion of the villagers from their homes.⁴⁹ Those historians

could have learned about the massacre in 'Illut from 'Arif al-'Arif's book which came out in the 1950s, as well as the testimonies of the inhabitants who returned to the village.⁵⁰

Army authorities had given permission to Bedouin families living near 'Illut—from the tribes of al-Hayb, al-Jawamis, al-Ghrayfat, al-'Iyadat, and al-Mazarib—to stay in the houses of the village during the winter months. The army appointed a mukhtar over them by the name of Muhammad al-Hayb (Abu Falah). The army even allowed a number of villagers from Saffuriyya who had originally remained in their village but later abandoned it to move to 'Illut. However, a year and a half after it had uprooted the population, the Israeli authorities consented to the return of the expellees from 'Illut from the Salesian monastery to their village. About half of the expellees from the village returned to their homes, while the other half remained refugees in Jordan and Syria. The military governor appointed a new mukhtar, Dhib Abu Ras, from among the villagers, and normal life returned to the village.

The historian Mustafa 'Abbasi, who studied events in 'Illut and Nazareth, argues that the pressure brought to bear by senior figures at the Salesian monastery and the French consul in Haifa was the most important factor leading to the decision to allow the 'Illut villagers to return.⁵¹ He mentions that on 3 January, an official representative of the government came to the head of the monastery and delivered a copy of the order by the government permitting the return. The villagers were told to be ready to return to their homes the following day. Indeed, on 4 January, the villagers, led by the monk Dubrovsky, walked to their homes.⁵² The villagers had to struggle for many more years to regain their lands; in the end they regained part of their lands while the rest was expropriated and given to neighboring Jewish settlements.

The villagers who returned to 'Illut did not forget what had happened to them, but fear prevented them from commemorating those events for dozens of years. On 8 May 2008, the villagers dared to commemorate the martyrs of the village in the presence of hundreds of participants. Three survivors of the bloody events in the village recounted the killings and expulsion to Nazareth and life at the monastery until their return in early 1950. The head of the local council, Ibrahim Abu Ras, spoke about the lands of the village prior to the year of the Nakba, which had extended to 27,000 dunums. Large sections of the land were expropriated as deserted property or the lands of refugees who could not return to their homes, or confiscated for other reasons, so that in 2008 only 3,330 dunums were left. On the same occasion, some 'Illut villagers in Syria and elsewhere published their memoirs on social media and in press interviews.⁵³

The Israeli authorities considered the villagers of 'Illut to be "present absentees" and confiscated their lands after they left the village in July 1948. The inhabitants of neighboring Jewish settlements coveted those lands and asked the government to annex a part of the land to their settlements. For example, the residents of the

moshav Nahalal asked the authorities to annex about 700 dunums of the deserted land of 'Illut; on 8 August 1948 they wrote: "It seems to us that the time is ripe to transfer these lands to permanent Jewish ownership."⁵⁴ Nor were they alone in seeking to loot the property of refugees and to ask for the annexation of their land. The villagers of 'Illut who returned to their homes lost a major part of their property, yet they considered themselves to be relatively fortunate because their period of exile was somewhat short, and they could eventually return to their village and to a part of their lands.

THE "PRESENT ABSENTEES" AS REFUGEES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY

After the end of the war, about twenty thousand Palestinians who remained in the Galilee found themselves living a short distance from their homes but unable to return to them. Nazareth had a large share of those forced to migrate, as there were about five thousand migrants in the city at the end of 1948. About half of them were expellees from Haifa, Tiberias, Bisan, 'Akka, and Shafa 'Amr.⁵⁵ Sami Juraysi prepared a detailed report on "refugees" in Nazareth and their living conditions in the city.⁵⁶ The report showed that the circumstances of the villagers among them were particularly harsh. At the Salesian orphanage there were about six hundred refugees from 'Illut, al-Mujaydil, and Um Qubi. The halls of the monastery were crowded with those individuals, and "there was nothing to separate families except for a string or a rope or a piece of wood."⁵⁷ Despite that, the circumstances of those refugees in Nazareth were much better than those of their brethren who ended up in refugee camps in Lebanon where they would spend the rest of their lives.

As we saw earlier, many residents of Haifa, Shafa 'Amr, and 'Akka were allowed to return to their cities, and the expellees from 'Illut to return to their village. However, all attempts by the villagers of Saffuriyya to return were met with very stiff resistance. Hundreds of those who had remained in their villages and dozens of those who had returned to their villages time and again were expelled. The forced migrants from Saffuriyya, al-Mujaydil, and Ma'lul remained the largest portion of refugees in Nazareth. The "present absentees" who still remained in Nazareth in the 1950s were half the original number. The consent of the Israeli authorities for the return of the residents of cities to Haifa, Shafa 'Amr, and 'Akka, was relatively cost-free. But the return of expellees to their villages was another matter, because settlers were greedy for the land; thus, the Israeli government continued to reject requests by expelled villagers to be allowed to return to their homes. Apart from Nazareth, Shafa 'Amr and Tamra in western Galilee absorbed thousands of refugees from that area,⁵⁸ while others went to villages in the Galilee pocket in upper and central Galilee and lived there until those villages were occupied in October 1948.

The stories of Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im, whose inhabitants were evacuated with false promises of returning within weeks, are well known. Those villagers discovered months later that Israel and its army had no intention of living up to their promises. They therefore decided not to keep quiet and to fight to return. In addition to direct contacts with the authorities, the villagers of Kufr Bir'im sent a delegation to meet with Maronite Archbishop Mubarak in Lebanon, requesting his help and intervention.⁵⁹ In February 1949 the Kufr Bir'im villagers carried out repairs and maintenance work on their houses to waterproof them for winter, but the army came and arrested sixty-five individuals, including the elderly and women, and transported them by truck to the Jordanian border near Jenin. But those exiles, like other forced migrants from the Galilee villages, did not remain in the West Bank; they went to the East Bank and from there to Syria and Lebanon. Shortly after they arrived in south Lebanon, they crossed the border and returned to their homes in the village of Jish.⁶⁰

This incident aroused the fears of the residents, who understood from the conduct of the army towards them that there was no real intention to allow them back in Kufr Bir'im. Those fears were exacerbated when they saw the men of HaKeren HaKayemet working their lands, which was followed by the establishment of the nucleus of a settlement by the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement on their land on 5 June 1949. Days later the settlers, supported by the police, kicked out the Palestinian young men who had spent months guarding the houses of the village and their contents. The settlers lived for about two years in the deserted houses of the village until they moved in the summer of 1951 into their new and permanent kibbutz Bar'am.⁶¹ During this period, the villagers continued their correspondence with the government and its representatives and met with officials in the hope that they would be returned to their village. However, their continued expulsion from Kufr Bir'im forced them to conclude that the authorities would never allow them to return.

In May 1951, after the Iqrit villagers had also despaired that the promises of return would be fulfilled, the residents of the two villages decided to go to the Supreme Court, and chose attorney Muhammad Nimr al-Hawwari to represent their cause. In the end the court did not come to the aid of the villagers and did not deliver the hoped-for justice, and subsequently the army and the settlers tore down the houses and uprooted most of the olive trees in 1953. Still, the inhabitants of the two villages did not give up hope, and became a symbol of the struggle by the "present absentees" to return. The cause of Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit gained fame locally and internationally but attempts to arrive at a compromise solution between the villagers and the government never gained traction.

The inhabitants of other villages in the Galilee also suffered as a result of experiences similar to Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit. The villagers of al-Ghabisiyya, located north of 'Akka, returned to their village at the end of 1948 after fighting in the area had ended. They had moved away from their houses following an attack on

their village in May 1948 and found temporary refuge in neighboring Arab villages. However, their return did not last long, as the army forced them to leave their homes and move to al-Mazra'a and Shaykh Danun at the end of January 1950. When the authorities prevented all their attempts to return, they sought relief from the Supreme Court, which ruled on 30 November 1951 that the villagers had a right to return to their houses in al-Ghabisiyya.⁶² Following this ruling the residents of al-Ghabisiyya went back to their homes the following month, but the army turned them out of their houses once again under the pretext that the village had been declared a closed military area. It became clear once again that the court ruling was merely formal and symbolic, and the army had overcome it through the use of the 1945 emergency regulations. As in Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im, the Israeli authorities tore down the houses of al-Ghabisiyya in order to put an end, once and for all, to the hopes of the villagers to return. Indeed, the only building left standing was the mosque, and in this way the authorities closed the file on returning to the village, a typical experience with many villages of the "present absentees."⁶³

The story of the villagers of Qadditha, close to Safad, is no less provoking and peculiar. Most of the villagers moved away from their homes after the fall of Safad, because they had been terrorized by the massacre perpetrated in neighboring 'Ayn al-Zaytun. Furthermore, the soldiers stationed at 'Ayn al-Zaytun used to direct sniper fire at the houses of Qadditha from time to time. This situation continued until October 1948 when Israel completed the occupation of the Galilee. 'Ali Hulayhel (Abu Husayn) recounts that, at the time, he had rented a house in the nearby village of Jish and in the summer months managed to harvest what he had planted on his land in Qadditha. After the occupation of the area in Operation Hiram, he migrated along with others and went to south Lebanon. Most of the villagers ended up in refugee camps, but the extended Hulayhel family managed to return to the Galilee because of its ties to Mano Friedman.⁶⁴

The villagers of Qadditha, which neighbors the villages of Jish and Safsaf, panicked after the killings by the Israeli army and decided to travel to South Lebanon. Mano Friedman was on good terms with several members of the Hulayhel clan with whom he had had commercial and agricultural dealings, and he sent an envoy to Khaled Hulayhel, who used to plow his land in Rosh Pinna, advising him to return to the Galilee at once. But Khaled said he would only come back with his entire clan, not by himself. Friedman agreed to that, so the members of the Hulayhel clan returned in December 1948, and were allowed to live in houses in the depopulated village of al-Ja'una, where they spent the winter.⁶⁵ Those expelled requested that they be allowed to return to their homes in Qadditha but all their requests were turned down, and it was suggested that they live in one of the depopulated villages. This was a general Israeli policy to prevent those who had been allowed to return from going back to their lands, leaving the land in the hands of the state and the returnees as "present absentees."

After repeated rejections of requests by the Hulayhel clan to return to their village Qadditha, the authorities had them move from al-Ja'una to the village of 'Akbara south of the city of Safad, which was accomplished by force and contrary to the wishes of the clan, in July 1949. Abu Husayn testified that the Hulayhel clan at the time numbered between 110 and 120. This forced removal of the Arab inhabitants from al-Ja'una was denounced, echoes of which reached the Knesset. There MK Eliezer Bray from Mapam raised questions about the matter and provided extensive details of the transfer operation which he called "an assault" by the army and police on the inhabitants of Arab villages in eastern Galilee.⁶⁶ Ben-Gurion as usual supported the security forces and justified what they had done until he had quieted the critics. The Hulayhel clan was isolated from the majority of the remaining Galilee population, so they were forced to accept their fate, which they preferred to living as refugees in south Lebanon.

MK Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi wrote in his memoirs that he went to visit 'Akbara to see the conditions of the forced migrants first-hand and to try to help them. Zu'bi arrived at the village with the military governor Elisha Soltz and Mano Friedman. The Knesset member described the difficult circumstances of the refugees in 'Akbara, which was so isolated that it could only be reached on horseback. Al-Zu'bi added that in coordination with the military governor and kibbutz Kokhav HaShahar it was possible to solve the problem by building a road and extending water to the village. According to Zu'bi, that alleviated the problems of those forced migrants and improved their conditions, but he admitted that he "did not go back to visit the village" after that.⁶⁷ Those who did visit the village up to the mid-1970s found that the inhabitants were still living under conditions unfit for human habitation. The road linking the village was a dirt road full of potholes, and the houses were threatened with collapse because of the lack of permission to do maintenance work.

Abu Husayn still remembered to the end of his days that Mano Friedman and the members of HaKeren HaKayemet who worked with members of his family in the forests used to come to visit him at home and enjoyed his hospitality. On those occasions they would renew their promises to help the Hulayhel clan who were living in dilapidated houses and shanties in the depopulated village of 'Akbara, but those promises were just "tranquilizers." A year or more after the Hulayhel clan was moved to 'Akbara, the authorities blew up the houses of Qadditha, as in several other villages whose residents were expelled.⁶⁸ In the 1970s, some Jewish settlers decided individually and without planning or a permit from the government to build houses near the destroyed houses of the village. Despite warnings from the government, those new settlers expanded their settlement on the lands of Qadditha without fear of the reaction of the authorities.

We conclude this section on "present absentees" with the unique tale of the survivors among the villagers of al-Khisas. Following a punitive Palmach operation in

December 1947, the inhabitants of this village, which lies to the north of Lake Hula, migrated, and most became refugees in Syria. However, Shaykh 'Atiya and dozens of members of his extended family thought they would be protected because of their good relations with their Jewish neighbors.⁶⁹ A number of members of that family volunteered to fight in the ranks of the Haganah and subsequently in the Israeli army during the 1948 war. At the end of that year, the army asked members of Shaykh 'Atiya's family to vacate that border region temporarily, and they did so. After several weeks Shaykh 'Atiya and a number of his children who had served in the army returned to their homes and started planting their fields anew, but soldiers and policemen came to the village on 5 June 1949 and asked them, without prior notice, "to vacate the premises immediately."⁷⁰ The security forces transported dozens of al-Khisas inhabitants who had remained to the foot of Kan'an Mountain and left them there without food or shelter.

Jewish friends of Shaykh 'Atiya tried to dissuade the authorities from this action to no avail. The regional council for upper Galilee, along with members of HaK-eren HaKayemet, with Yosef Nahmani at their head, sent letters, also to no avail. On 1 August 1948, the minister of defense was asked at the beginning of a Knesset meeting to submit an answer regarding the expulsion of the inhabitants of al-Khisas. Ben-Gurion provided an answer two weeks later to the effect that "the transport operation was carried out at the request of the commander of the northern region for military reasons and it was carried out by the military government of East Galilee." The government acknowledged the loyalty of the inhabitants of al-Khisas, but it decided for security reasons to prevent those Arabs from living along the border. When winter was near, they were moved to Wadi al-Hamam.⁷¹

After two years of mediation efforts, with the encouragement of his friends, Shaykh 'Atiya raised a case in the Supreme Court.⁷² Two of the best Arab lawyers at the time, Hanna Naqqara and Elias Kusa, volunteered to take on the case, and the court accepted the claim that expelling Shaykh 'Atiya and his family from their homes and taking them to the foot of Kan'an Mountain, and from there to Wadi Hamam in 1949, was illegal. But the army repaired the "technical" error it had committed by issuing an order (expulsion) to each of the expellees (the plaintiffs) on 7 July 1952 in accordance with the defense (emergency) regulations of 1949 (security regions—no. 2). Following that step, the Supreme Court turned down the request by the plaintiffs and cancelled the provisional order it had issued earlier. The court added in its decision: "Seeing as the expulsion orders were issued after the provisional order, we hold the defendants responsible for court costs in the amount of 75 liras." The court also recommended that a solution be found for those people "who cooperated with the Jews of the country for a long time, some of whom even fought on the side of Israel in its war of independence." The court concluded its recommendations to the authorities concerned, asking that they "do what they can to find a suitable arrangement which is consistent with the requirements of security and allows the plaintiffs to return to their village."⁷³ But

the recommendations were not acted on, and Shaykh 'Atiya and his sons still live in Wadi Hamam.

THE STORY OF "THE PRISONER" 'AWDA AL-'ASHHAB AND HIS FRIENDS

At the end of December 1948, Israeli soldiers reached Abu 'Ujayla in Sinai and found a number of communists in the detention camp who had been arrested after distributing leaflets attacking the intervention of the armies of Arab states in the Palestine war.⁷⁴ Among the detainees were Salim al-Qasim, Hasan Abu 'Isha, As'ad Makki, 'Ali 'Ashur, Muhammad Khas, and 'Awda al-'Ashhab. Instead of being given medals for their fight in favor of partition and against the intervention of Arab armies in the Palestine war, those comrades were moved to jails in Israel. From Abu 'Ujayla the prisoners were taken to Bir Sab'a (Beersheba) and from there to a POW camp in Ijlil (Gilot today).⁷⁵ Members of Maki, with the help of Mapam members, tried to obtain the release of their friends but failed, at which point MK Meir Vilner, a signatory of Israel's declaration of independence, decided to bring up the case for debate in the Knesset.

In a strongly-worded and aggressive speech, Vilner told the story of "the liberation of the warriors of the secret Arab resistance who fought against the Egyptians" from the Abu 'Ujayla jail. Out of all the comrades, he mentioned Salim al-Qasim, who was the general secretary of the organizations of Arab workers in the country and a friend of "an Israeli minister: Zalman Shazar." Then Vilner addressed the minister directly, inquiring: "Is it civilized that your friend should be imprisoned for months in a detention camp?" He replied to this question with a decisive demand that the matter be listed on the Knesset agenda. He added: "We must demand that the government free those warriors for freedom immediately." He concluded his speech by saying: "Those men do not deserve this treatment, while the supporters of the fascists (sic [in original]), such as Khaiyat of Haifa, have won the status of respected personalities in the official circles of the Israeli government."⁷⁶

Despite the complaints about the conditions under which the members of the League were being held, the detainees themselves admitted, in their typed and oral testimonies, that they were being well treated compared to the rest of the Arab prisoners. The good treatment began even before they arrived in the detention camps and continued after they got there. 'Awda al-'Ashhab mentions an unusual event in his memoir: an army officer had heard him shout that they were Palestinian communists, not Egyptian soldiers, so the officer immediately asked: "If you are really communists, tell me: Which Palestinian communist is married to a Jewish woman?" Al-'Ashhab adds that his comrade, Hasan Abu 'Isha, who lived and worked in Jaffa, went up to where the officer was standing and said to him: "I know. It is our comrade Jabra Nicola and his wife, comrade Eliza." The officer

answered: “That is right, and Eliza is my sister.” From that moment on, the way the officers treated us changed, because we were all communists.”⁷⁷

Early in 1949, the communist press began demanding that the party comrades be released. *Al-Ittihad* published a news item on its front page about the prisoners Salim al-Qasim, Hasan Abu ‘Isha, As‘ad Makki and others, demanding that they be set free immediately.⁷⁸ Both Arab and Jewish communists continued raising the issue of the twelve detainees and demanding their release without delay. MK Vilner declared: “All the Hebrew press has published the news of their deeds and their struggle on the side of the state of Israel and its army.” He asked: “Does it make sense that people who fought on our side should be imprisoned after we freed them from the Egyptian detention camp?”⁷⁹

Most of the communists whom Vilner described as “warriors of the secret Arab resistance movement” were from Jerusalem, Hebron, and Gaza, which Israel had not occupied, and which were outside Israel’s borders. In spite of that, the leaders of Maki insisted on the need to allow them to live in the state of the Jews on an equal footing. Most members of this group were not married, and after they were released and won approval to live in Israel, they became involved in party activities and institutions, and added new blood to the party alongside their Arab comrades. However, some were married, and submitted applications for family reunification, with a number of these applications approved on an extraordinary basis. This special treatment granted to the communist prisoners supports what was said in previous chapters concerning “bringing back many members of the League” from Lebanon to Haifa and Nazareth and other places.

At the beginning of 1949, prisoner of war camps in Israel held over 9,000 Arabs. Many of those came from the Galilee, and had been arrested and imprisoned after the end of the fighting because they were of recruitment age. A number of them were arrested in western Galilee and lower Galilee in the wake of the ten-day battles in July 1948. The majority had been arrested following the occupation of the Galilee under Operation Hiram. Hundreds of prisoners spent over a year in POW camps in servitude, working without pay instead of being with their families and supporting them. This subject has not received attention from Palestinian researchers and historians until recently, but a new study published in 2013 has shed light on many aspects of the lives of those prisoners and their experiences in Israeli detention centers.⁸⁰

At the end of June, the twelve comrades were set free as a group and went to Nazareth. Activists in the league, led by Saliba Khamis, welcomed them like heroes and courageous warriors. After five days in Nazareth, ‘Awda al-‘Ashhab decided to visit Jerusalem without an official permit from the military government. When he got to the city to see his house in the German Colony, he found it deserted amidst signs of looting, like the rest of the Arab houses in West Jerusalem.⁸¹ Al-‘Ashhab found some solace in the reception he received from party comrades in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, who organized a number of lectures for him on his experiences

under detention.⁸² When he returned to Nazareth, party leaders saw to it that he would have a place to live and employment (along with two of his comrades, 'Ali 'Ashur and Muhammad Khas) in the party newspaper in Haifa, and they obtained verbal permission from the military administration for him to travel freely after July 1949.

Once al-'Ashhab settled into his job in Haifa, he submitted a family reunification application to have his wife, Mariam, and his only daughter (who had remained in Hebron), join him, but the authorities did not approve the application, rejecting it multiple times. Party leaders went to work to arrange a family reunification deal for him through political means, using their connections with decision-makers in the government and the Knesset. MK Tawfiq Tubi submitted a list of questions for Minister of Police Shitrit on 11 December 1950 inquiring why the police were opposed to the reunification of the al-'Ashhab family. Minister Shitrit's reply in the Knesset on 1 January 1951 was that family reunification was the remit of the minister of migration.⁸³ But MK Tubi was not satisfied with this answer and added that the ministry in question had rejected the application on the basis of a letter dated 18 October 1950 from officer Shalush of the Tel Aviv police. The minister replied simply that he had no knowledge of this letter, but that he would look into the matter.

Two weeks later, Immigration Minister Haim Moshe Shapira replied to the question from MK Tubi concerning the case of al-'Ashhab family.⁸⁴ First, Shapira acknowledged the accuracy of Shitrit's response, and said that his ministry, not the police, was responsible for issuing "return permits" or rejecting the applications. As for the application in question, he explained the reasons for rejecting it, saying: "The return of al-'Ashhab and members of his family would be from their place of residence, Hebron, which is outside the borders of Israel." He added: "What is requested of us is to bring in this family, not allow it to return, since its members were never part of the permanent residents of a region that is now part of the state of Israel. Such a request is for something we unfortunately cannot do." However, MK Tubi was not convinced by the answer. He said: "But you approved family reunification for a friend of al-'Ashhab and his family who are from Jerusalem. Why then discriminate against the return of al-'Ashhab?" Minister Shapira replied: "I am prepared to study the case. Perhaps that was a special (humanitarian) case which was dealt with outside the scope of the law."⁸⁵ The minister concluded his remarks by saying that such a case could be approved, but the approval would not be obligatory.

The give and take in the Knesset were taking place in tandem with a changing situation on the ground. The al-'Ashhab family had in fact been united while Knesset members were listening to Tubi's questions and the minister's answers. 'Awda al-'Ashhab was a man steeped in political action and labor struggles in the field. He could no longer wait for his party leaders to convince the Israeli authorities to approve family reunification in his case, so he paid a man from the village of

Sandala, which neighbors Jenin, to smuggle in his wife and child. Thus, the family's hope of reuniting was realized after more than a year of separation.⁸⁶ Mariam and her young daughter lived in hiding in the houses of friends and party comrades for months. Meanwhile, *al-Ittihad* was highlighting the trials and tribulations of the family which the Israeli authorities were denying reunification "under the pretext of security risks."⁸⁷ When the authorities discovered that his wife and daughter had "infiltrated" into the country, they were furious and went looking for them day and night. At that time, the al-'Ashhab family were living in the houses of Jewish comrades, including the house of a member of the Knesset.⁸⁸

The circumstances of the family, who lived constantly in hiding and on the move, deteriorated after Mariam al-'Ashhab became pregnant and gave birth "in secret" in August 1952. When she was close to giving birth, his party comrades came to help the family. Dr. Lieberman was working in the maternity ward at Rambam Hospital (in Haifa) and al-'Ashhab's wife was admitted to the ward, although she had no papers, and gave birth to baby daughter Shadya on 20 August 1952.⁸⁹ Mother and daughter were discharged three days later without a birth certificate or registration. When the police discovered this they concentrated on tracking down the family to arrest them, so Mariam al-'Ashhab was moved with her two children to the house of an Arab family in Jaffa. Ibrahim Sha'ath, who was originally from Gaza and was living in al-'Ajami quarter, hosted the family in spite of the risks. Soon, however, intelligence operatives found out where the family was hiding in Jaffa, so the comrades moved her to the house of MK Moshe Sneh in Tel Aviv.⁹⁰

It was not easy for the al-'Ashhab family to continue living in hiding and to keep moving out of fear of the police. In addition to living apart from her husband, Mariam al-'Ashhab suffered from social and cultural isolation because it was difficult to socialize with her Jewish hosts in Tel Aviv and Haifa. This went on for about five years, until 1954, when Maki leaders and Knesset members decided on an extraordinary step and brought 'Awda al-'Ashhab and his wife and small daughter Shadya to the Knesset. The family had prepared a detailed account of its story in both Hebrew and Arabic along with a banner about a sit-in strike. Prime Minister Moshe Sharett called Minister of Police Shitrit and asked him to resolve the family reunification issue immediately. The office of Haifa Mayor Abba Hushi got in touch with the al-'Ashhab family and the issue was settled quickly after years of lobbying government offices and the Knesset and appealing to the courts.⁹¹

THE ATYPICAL RETURN OF THE ATTORNEY KHALIL TUMA 'ABBUD

We have seen what some Israeli institutions did to encourage the Arabs who remained in Israel to emigrate to far away countries, such as Argentina, Libya, and other elsewhere. *Al-Ittihad* published a news item in early 1952 exposing one such secret plan by the foreign ministry.⁹² In tandem with the work by the Israeli authorities to have Jews from Libya immigrate to Israel, some employees of those

authorities sought to convince Arab residents of Jaffa and other cities to emigrate from Israel to Libya. Many details of the immigration of the remaining Jews in the Arab states (including Libya) in which the intelligence agencies of many states were involved—such as the United States, Britain, and others—are still being kept secret from researchers.⁹³ Israel was successful in bringing Jews from Libya to Israel in the early 1950s, but it failed to convince the Palestinians who remained to leave their country.

Amidst these plans to encourage the immigration of Jews from Libya, the details of the story of the return of one Palestinian (a new arrival) could be woven into a literary work or film, with the hero being Khalil Tuma 'Abbud, who had been studying law in Britain before the war and the onset of the Nakba. He ended up in Tripoli, Libya, after a long journey and from there returned to Haifa in 1952. The story of his return along with hundreds of Libyan Jews on board a ship to Haifa is remarkable.

Khalil 'Abbud was born in 1926 in the village of al-Rama. After his father, Tuma, died when Khalil was nine years old, he lived alone with his widowed mother—her only son. After he completed secondary school, he travelled to London in 1945 to study law. He and his mother planned that he should return to Palestine on completion of his studies and that he would become a respectable lawyer in mandatory Palestine. The scholarship he won from the mandatory British government was sufficient to cover the cost of his studies at University College London (UCL) up to 1948. When war broke out, he had one more year to complete his studies. It did not occur to Khalil at the time that it might be wise to stop his studies and return to the Galilee. He said, "I did not think at the time that there would be problem concerning my return to the country after I completed my studies."⁹⁴

Khalil 'Abbud was one of hundreds of Palestinians who had travelled to continue their studies in Beirut, Cairo, or in European countries before the Nakba. There were also dozens of businessmen and merchants outside Palestine when the war broke out. Many students and businessmen and others who were travelling for other reasons did not return to Palestine in 1948 and waited for the guns to fall silent. In earlier chapters we read the stories of some who returned to Haifa and the Galilee from Lebanon and other neighboring countries, but the Israeli authorities banned the return of hundreds of Palestinian students, although they were innocent of any wrongdoing. Palestine had disappeared from the map of the world, and many Palestinians found that their passports had become worthless after the end of the Mandate and the establishment of the state of Israel on the ruins of Palestine. The story of the student Khalil 'Abbud is typical of the situation of hundreds of others who, at the end of their studies, were cut off from their families and found themselves strangers in what was, out of necessity, a land of refuge.

In the summer of 1949, at the end of his studies, Khalil 'Abbud understood that his Palestinian passport would not enable him to visit his family in the Galilee. He therefore registered to continue his studies to obtain a master's degree. But after several months he decided to stop, and looked for a solution to his passport

problem. It was then that he heard that Jordan was issuing passports at its London embassy, and granting citizenship to Palestinians. So he went to the embassy, and on 5 January 1950, he was issued a Jordanian passport (no. 033001). Then, he was faced with a dilemma: Where should he travel on that passport? Since five of his maternal uncles were living in Brazil he decided to go there, where he spent an enjoyable time with his relatives and found work in Sao Paulo as an English language teacher. At the end of the school year he decided to return to Europe and from there to Jordan, where he was now a citizen.

The ship on which Khalil 'Abbud was travelling took him from Brazil to Portugal and from there to Italy. From Italy he took another ship to Beirut, which stopped for a few hours in Alexandria. Since Khalil did not have an entry visa, he obtained a 24-hour transit permit for passage to Syria. When he reached Damascus, he met a number of his friends, and after spending a month there he travelled to Amman where he hoped to find work. He was not able to practice law in Jordan, so he took a temporary job teaching English. Libya was encouraging Palestinian professionals to come to work for the new government, so 'Abbud signed up to go work there, and a few months later he received a telegram informing him he had been accepted. He traveled via Cairo to Tripoli, where he was employed as a legal consultant at a government office.

In Tripoli, Khalil 'Abbud became acquainted with several Palestinians who, like himself, had come to work there, including Shawqi Bey al-Sa'd from Haifa.⁹⁵ Shawqi Bey had come to Tripoli with some of the British who had withdrawn from Haifa in 1948. These two Palestinians found many topics of conversation of mutual interest. The Sa'd family owned much land in the villages of Shajur and Kufr 'Inan which were close to al-Rama. Khalil's father was a large landowner in his village and was in the habit of selling land to cover his living expenses and to spend on his large house. Such topics and memories of Palestine and family before the Nakba stirred a yearning in Khalil 'Abbud for his village, his mother, and other relatives. One day Shawqi Bey surprised his guest Khalil with a direct question: whether he cared to go back to the Galilee. Naturally the answer was yes, but the more important question was how? Shawqi Bey said: "You will hear the answer to that right away."

Shawqi Bey al-Sa'd (according to Khalil 'Abbud's testimony) was head of the general security branch in Tripoli, which is similar to the British Criminal Investigation Department. Shawqi Bey picked up the telephone and spoke to Meir Shelon.⁹⁶ Khalil 'Abbud heard his host ask Shelon for help for a "dear friend by the name of Khalil 'Abbud," who wanted to return to Haifa and the Galilee. At the end of the conversation, Khalil asked who this Shelon was, and how could he help him in his journey? Shawqi Bey replied that Shelon was Israel's representative in Tripoli, with the rank of consul, and that his principal responsibility was to arrange for the remaining Jews in Libya to go to Israel on ships that sailed from Tripoli to Malta and Napoli and from there to Haifa. From that conversation it became clear

that Shawqi Bey (the Palestinian refugee from Haifa) was the security official in charge of extending the residence visa of Shelon (the Israeli consul) in Tripoli. That is why Shelon said at the end of the conversation that he would investigate the available possibilities with the authorities and do what he could to help.

Just a few days later, Shelon invited Khalil 'Abbud to meet him, and he asked him to bring his passport so he could arrange a permit for him to enter Israel. Indeed, an entrance visa (no. 41227) was issued and opened the door for Khalil to return with the Jews who were emigrating from Libya to Israel. It is the remaining documentary proof of what happened to this Palestinian refugee. So, Khalil 'Abbud boarded the ship *Artsa*, which sailed to Haifa by way of Naples. His relatives were waiting for him at the port of Karmil and within hours had him back at his family's home. Thus Khalil 'Abbud was back in the Galilee after three years of moving from one country to the other in the Palestinian diaspora. The astonishing point in this story is that he achieved this as a "new immigrant" ["oleh hadash" in Zionist terms], based on an entrance visa printed on his Jordanian passport dated August 1952. On the first page of the passport was written in Hebrew: "Mr. 'Abbud Khalil relinquished his Jordanian citizenship in order to obtain Israeli citizenship."⁹⁷

This is the story of a young Palestinian man whose Palestinian citizenship "evaporated" with the onset of the Nakba, and is an example of the consequences of the disaster of 1948. But the happy ending allowed Khalil 'Abbud to return to the Galilee and to become a lawyer and a teacher, and then a judge in Israel. Many like him who were studying outside Palestine were unable to return to their homeland as he did. One of those was Subhi Farah Khuri who began as a pharmacy student at the American University of Beirut in 1944. Subhi used to return to his family in Nazareth during summer break each year. He spent his last summer vacation there in 1947 and returned to Beirut in September by way of Ra's al-Naqura to complete his studies. When he graduated in 1951, his mother submitted an official application for his return to Nazareth, but the application was rejected despite the many recommendations that were submitted. His mother appealed to the Supreme Court for justice in seeking the return of her son,⁹⁸ but this court too rejected the mother's plea, leaving the family with no choice but to accept being divided from each other.

BETWEEN ROUTINE REPRESSION AND TERRIFYING EVENTS

The agreement to transfer the Triangle to Israeli control included a clause according to which any citizen who decided to emigrate from his town or village had the right to take all his belongings from his house with him and to receive full compensation for the property and land he left behind. Israel brought pressure to bear on the residents of Wadi 'Ara to emigrate and leave the region. When the pressures and the temptations did not work, the authorities resorted to force to

compel the residents of small villages to leave their homes and lands. Most of the forced migrants were moved to the village of Umm al-Fahm, Baqa al-Gharbiya, and several other villages. Thus, dozens of families were uprooted from the villages of Bayada, 'Ayn al-Sahla, 'Ayn al-Zaytuna, 'Ayn Jarar, and other hamlets.⁹⁹

At the same time that the state was encouraging the inhabitants of the villages of the Triangle to migrate to the Arab side of the border, it intensified measures to prevent movement from there to the Israeli side. Several residents of the area paid with their lives for what Israel considered to be violations of its borders and laws. But the inhabitants, who had become accustomed for generations to move freely between the villages and cities of the area, did not stop altogether from crossing the border in both directions, despite the grave dangers. Thus, life for the population of the Triangle continued under repression and routine danger, on the one hand, and news about the killing of "infiltrators" and smugglers, on the other. The Israeli police and army would conduct searches of the houses and villages from time to time under the guise of security considerations. At times, the security forces themselves encouraged Palestinians whom they had recruited for the collection of intelligence to go back and forth, and even to assassinate people on the Jordanian side of the border.¹⁰⁰ Against this background, the line between ordinary and permitted movement and "infiltration" which cost people their lives remained hazy.

'Ara: Dead and Wounded in June 1952

The incident in 'Ara in which two were killed and five others wounded in the summer of 1952 at the hands of Israeli soldiers created a large political and media stir. The villagers had come close to the border on the Israeli side to meet their relatives on the Jordanian side on Eid al-Fitr (the feast ending the Ramadan fast), as had become customary each year. Such behavior was not unusual on feast days and special occasions and was permitted by the Israeli authorities and security forces. It is true that the killing of "infiltrators" or smugglers was routine in the early 1950s, but firing on unarmed civilians on a feast day when none of them had crossed the border or constituted a danger to anyone caused a disturbance in the press, the Knesset, and the government. The circumstances of this incident was replicated on a larger scale by the Kafr Qasim massacre of 1956. On both occasions, the narrative was of innocent citizens being fired on by soldiers in cold blood because they considered them to be "lawbreakers" with no prior notice being given of the application of a new policy that day.

On 21 June that year, the first day of Eid al-Fitr, the people of Wadi 'Ara prepared to meet their relatives from the Jordanian side near 'Ayn al-Sahla as usual each year.¹⁰¹ The next day the army posted an observer force which prevented the villagers from coming near the border. However, those soldiers left the area at noon, and the villagers once again came close to the border so that they could see their relatives on the other side. On the morning of 23 June, the soldiers returned, and set a trap near the border. At 8:30 when dozens of villagers (men, women, and

children) drew close to 'Ayn al-Sahla, the soldiers opened fire on them without warning. Two were killed and five others wounded, including an elderly man and two children eleven years of age.¹⁰²

This painful incident made the population very angry, prompting denunciation by opposition parties and demands that the criminals be punished. MK Hanan Rubin of Mapam demanded that the officer responsible for giving the order to fire on innocent citizens be put on trial to remove the blot on the army's honor.¹⁰³ Other members of the Knesset went so far as to blame Prime Minister Ben-Gurion himself because he had not decided to have the accused tried. MKs Rustum Bastuni and Mordechai Bentov visited the village to offer their condolences, which soldiers in the village tried unsuccessfully to prevent.¹⁰⁴ An investigating committee was eventually formed which collected statements from all sides and submitted a report to the ministries of foreign affairs and security. Ben-Gurion announced the results of the investigation and said that the soldiers were not guilty of a criminal offense, just an unpremeditated error.¹⁰⁵

Ben-Gurion chose to speak at length about the challenges that faced the army, the problem of "infiltration" in the region, and the difficult tasks with which the soldiers were burdened. Attorney Elias Kusa of Haifa replied to the speech by the prime minister and minister of defense in a letter rebutting the explanation of killing as combatting "infiltrators." In the case of 'Ara villagers there were no "infiltrators, just citizens who came close to the border from the Israeli side so that they could see their relatives."¹⁰⁶ But Ben-Gurion and the security establishment supported the soldiers and claimed that the problem lay in the error of the decision to shoot. Thus, this tragic incident was wrapped up and became part of a long sequence of ordinary events in which Arab citizens were killed by the police and army under the pretext of combatting infiltration. Due to the large number of such incidents in the villages of the Triangle, some villages created special cemeteries for "infiltrators."¹⁰⁷ In addition to hundreds killed along the borders and inside the West Bank, each year dozens of citizens of the Triangle were killed in their villages during combing and search operations for "infiltrators."

The Day of the Airplane: The Search Operation in al-Tira Village

The villagers of al-Tira faced major difficulties with their Jewish neighbors, who tried to occupy the village during the 1948 battles. The residents participated in the defense of their village alongside Iraqi volunteers under the command of Madlul 'Abbas. When the residents heard that the villages of the Triangle would soon be transferred to Israeli control, they became very fearful of retaliation from their neighbors. However, the first few years after the transfer (1949–52) passed relatively peacefully without any unusual incidents. In fact, the military government chose al-Tira in 1952 as the venue for celebrations of Israel's Independence Day for the entire Arab population of the south Triangle. The villagers, particularly the educated ones, exerted great efforts on that occasion to please the military government.

One al-Tira resident who was present at the time described those festivities in great detail, which included sports competitions, speeches, and the like.¹⁰⁸

However, this relatively peaceful atmosphere changed abruptly following the allegation that gunfire from the village had been directed at an Israeli airplane; suddenly the al-Tira villagers felt the iron fist of the security forces. Some villagers feared that the army would carry out a massacre or expel the population as a belated reaction to their role during the war.¹⁰⁹ Suwaylih Mansur, the head of al-Tira's council, said that a curfew was imposed on the village on 31 July 1953. At 3:30 in the morning the search of the houses began, and continued throughout the day until 8:30 p.m. The army informed the village notables that an officer had been wounded the night before and that the accused was hiding in one of the houses of the village, which was why the military government was carrying out a combing operation.¹¹⁰ At the end of the operation it became apparent that a great deal of damage had been done to the houses and their contents. In addition to the material damages, this incident had a psychological impact on the children who witnessed the soldiers insulting their relatives who had done nothing wrong.

MK Faris Hamdan visited al-Tira and held a press conference with Suwayla Mansur to expose the extent of the damages suffered by the villagers as a result of the breaking of furniture and the theft of valuable items by the soldiers.¹¹¹ A pregnant woman had suffered a miscarriage on the same day, and children had been terrorized by the violent conduct of the soldiers. MK Emil Habibi came to the village to express his support for the villagers and to examine the damages caused by the army operation in the village. The incident gave rise to critical reactions and condemnation by Arabs and Jews, who asked the government to investigate and to punish those responsible for the assaults on the al-Tira residents.¹¹² However, the acting defense minister, Pinhas Lavon, poured fuel on the fire in his satirical response in the Knesset, in the course of which he spoke arrogantly about the "excursion" by the soldiers and "the delicate pianos and aristocratic furniture" in the houses of al-Tira.¹¹³

The Story of the Conversion of the al-Subayh Arabs to Christianity

The story of the al-Subayh Arabs who settled near Mount Tabur is extraordinary and reflects a reality that challenges the imagination concerning the experiences of those who remained in Israel in the 1950s. Most of the clan of al-Subayh Arabs were forced to migrate during the Nakba and became refugees either in Jordan or Syria after the area was occupied and the Israeli army perpetrated a massacre in June 1948. Relations between al-Subayh Arabs and their Jewish neighbors had been generally good prior to the outbreak of the war. However, an incident in nearby kibbutz Keshet on 16 March 1948, in which seven Jewish young men were killed, including Eli Ben Tzvi, the son of a Zionist leader who became the second president of Israel, totally derailed good neighborly relations. Following that incident, voices were raised in the Knesset and outside it demanding immediate

retribution; Yigal Alon, the head of the Palmach, calmed the atmosphere and urged postponing retaliation.

The time for vengeance came on 8 June 1948, to be exacted on the family of the head of the clan, 'Ali Nimr al-'Agla. That day most members of the al-Subayh clan were not at home, and dozens of the men who were there fled when they saw hundreds of Israeli troops heading towards their campsite. Only two blind men and two sisters of the head of the clan and their children remained. They were all killed and their bodies dismembered with axes and knives. Body parts were hidden in large oil containers so that the sight of the victims was blood chilling and terrifying. When the relatives returned, they buried the bodies in a collective grave in a cave near al-Mansur spring.¹¹⁴

This massacre had a tremendous impact on members of the clan, who tried to hide in Wadi Salama, the village of 'Ayn Mallaha, and elsewhere. Eventually, most of the clan left the area and became refugees in Jordan and Syria. A few dozen families who decided to stay found refuge among their relatives, al-Shibli Arabs. Some members of the al-Subayh clan who lost all their lands in the year of the Nakba became smugglers and would routinely cross the borders. The events of the 1948 war and the attending loss of land led to turbulent relations between the remaining clan members and the neighboring Jews. But in 1954 there was a unique event, due to the theft of some rifles from the Shadmot Dvora settlement.

Towards the end of 1954, rifles were stolen from the arsenal of the settlement near Mount Tabur in lower Galilee, and the settlers and police accused the al-Subayh clan of the theft with no evidence to substantiate their claim. The military government imposed a permanent curfew on the whole clan, which prevented them from making a living or maintaining contact with the neighboring Arab villages. The authorities also issued expulsion orders against some of those accused of the theft, who were exiled to Shafa 'Amr, Majd al-Krum, and Tarshiha.¹¹⁵ This collective punishment and exile went on for six months, as did the curfew on the al-Subayh Arabs. In an effort to alleviate their misfortune, some clan notables climbed to the monastery on Mount Tabur and asked to convert to Christianity. The monks contacted the churches in Nazareth and the Vatican, while members of the clan started taking lessons on the Christian faith from the monks. This novel plan succeeded in lifting the siege imposed on them, and the press took up the story.

When the military government learned that the story of al-Subayh Arabs and the monastery had spread widely, they decided to end the embarrassing issue quietly. Some members of the clan (at the request of Giyura Zayed) agreed to go to Jordan to investigate the matter of the rifles and to acquire them.¹¹⁶ Two of the rifles stolen from the settlement were brought back. The Israeli authorities came to believe that the theft had been motivated by commercial gain, not security considerations. That, along with the conversion of the clan to Christianity, contributed to the lifting of the curfew and the return to normal life. This story demonstrates the wide discretion of the military government in imposing collective

punishment on the Arab population. On the other hand, the “craftiness” of the clan members and how they chose to press their grievances had proved useful; others who remained after the Nakba learned the sensitivities of the authorities and their weak points and exploited them for their own interests to counter the whims of the military governors.

The Events of Kufr Manda in 1954

In December 1954 the final touches were put on a plan to build a water catchment on the lands of Kufr Manda, between Shafa ‘Amr and Nazareth. Attempts by the government to convince the villagers to sell their lands or to relinquish them for this purpose failed. When workers began to build the catchment the villagers gathered to prevent further work on their lands in order to protect them from being confiscated. At one point, a clash broke out between the villagers and the police on the scene. The police responded to stone-throwing with violence and chased the villagers back to their homes, arresting dozens of them. On that day (13 December) the police led dozens of handcuffed detainees on foot from Kufr Manda to the Dhahir al-‘Umar fort in Shafa ‘Amr and locked them up in a stable for horses and other livestock. Some of the detainees were released after two or three days, but thirty-seven others were kept under detention and brought before a military court on the charge of assaulting police officers and obstructing their work and the work of employees of the water company.¹¹⁷

Hanna Abu Hanna visited the village a few days after the event, and recorded his impressions of the atmosphere in the village on “Uri’s day,” named after the officer responsible for the arrests.¹¹⁸ The villagers told Abu Hanna and another Maki party activist about the clashes and arrests: Following the clash in the early hours of the morning, the police sent a large force of reinforcements that chased the inhabitants back to their houses. Many young men fled to the mountains while others hid in the mosque. The villagers said that dozens were arrested at the mosque and in their homes and were made to march a distance of twelve kilometers on foot to Shafa ‘Amr. Abu Hanna heard the complaints of the villagers about the insults and the torture of the prisoners. That event, near the end of 1954, constituted the first mass protest action in defense of what was left of Arab land in the face of the policy of continuous expropriations since 1948.

The Communist Party, which played an important role in the struggle to protect what remained of Arab lands, attempted to organize protests and condemnation of what happened in Kufr Manda. In Nazareth, party representatives in the municipality demanded that an extraordinary session of the municipal council be convened, which the head of the council at the time refused. However, Khalil Khuri took advantage of the first ordinary session to declare that “the danger that the government may implement its project to steal the lands of al-Battuf and to expel over 15,000 Arab farmers there threatens all the masses of the Arab minority and not just the residents of al-Battuf.”¹¹⁹ After Nazareth, it was the turn of party

activists in 'Ilabun, who signed a petition in the name of dozens of villagers which was sent to the prime minister, expressing their condemnation of the police attack on the Kufr Manda villagers and the arrest of dozens, including those injured, and forcing them to march on foot to Shafa 'Amr. The signatories ended their protest letter by saying: "The attack on the residents of Kufr Manda is an attack on all Arab citizens of Israel."¹²⁰

A few days later another petition was submitted to the government concerning picking olives in 'Arraba and Dayr Hanna.¹²¹ The text of these two petitions was similar to the text of the 'Ilabun petition. It was very clear that the Communist Party had organized this action of solidarity with the Kufr Manda villagers in protest against the violent assault in order to confront the daily policy of repression and the expropriation of land. To counter the military government policy of imposed isolation on the population, in the 1950s a movement of coordination and solidarity among the remaining Palestinians in their various locations was born. The activists of the Communist Party in Haifa and the Galilee, who had stood up to the military government policy since 1949, had acquired experience. They were therefore the natural candidates to lead the struggle in the villages of the Galilee. When news of the Kafr Qasim massacre spread two years later, Tawfiq Tubi and other Maki leaders were the first to break the silence which the Israeli government tried to impose on the event.

THE 1956 KAFR QASIM MASSACRE: A TURNING POINT

On 29 October 1956, just hours after Israel launched its aggression against Egypt, Border Guards perpetrated a massacre in which almost fifty people from the village of Kafr Qasim lost their lives. The villagers who became the victims did not know that the army had imposed a curfew on villages in the Triangle beginning one hour earlier than usual, at 5:00 p.m. instead of 6:00 p.m. When some of the villagers (men, women, and children) reached the village entrance, Border Guard troops stopped them at a barricade they had earlier erected, and opened fire on groups and on individuals, killing forty-nine people in cold blood.¹²² Several others were killed that evening in other villages in the southern Triangle. This criminal act was the culmination of an Israeli policy of repression and discrimination, which saw the Palestinians remaining after the Nakba as a "fifth column" that was best eliminated. The massacre can also be seen as the result of statements by Israeli politicians who had been waiting for a second round of war with the Arabs in order to uproot and expel the remaining Palestinians. The aggression against Egypt and the massacre at the end of October 1956 represented a turning point in relations between Israel and its Arab citizens, reminding them that the Nakba had not ended with the war of 1948.

Some historians see the Sinai war and the massacre at Kafr Qasim as the result of the Israeli policy of collective punishment in the 1950s. For example, Benny

Morris wrote: “During that period, Israel implemented a policy along its entire border of shooting at infiltrators to kill. The soldiers, policemen, and border guards fired on everything that moved, particularly at night.”¹²³ As is well known in Israeli historical literature, none of those killers was ever put on trial, neither members of the military nor civilian Jews who killed Arabs on both sides of the border. Morris added in *Israel’s Border Wars* that “between 2,700 and 5,000 Arab infiltrators were killed. All indicators point to the fact that the vast majority of those killed were unarmed.”¹²⁴

Information about the massacre of the forty-nine victims from Kafr Qasim is well known and documented by the eyewitness testimonies of the survivors. There is also unanimity concerning the circumstances as well as the background of the event, which was the start of the Israeli invasion of Egypt as part of the Sinai War, along with France and Britain. The direct causes of the Kafr Qasim massacre and its details are documented in the court’s judgment in the trial of the Border Guards. The few pages here merely attempt to place this massacre within the chain of painful events which began with the Nakba, to reveal to new generations the difficult times endured by the first generations of Palestinians who remained in Israel in the 1950s. There are still open questions for which the historical literature provides no definitive answers or consensus regarding the responsibilities of the Israeli political and military leaders at the time. Was the Kafr Qasim massacre part of a plan to terrorize the population of the southern Triangle to induce them to migrate, as had happened to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948?

As is well known, the Israeli government was obliged to put the officers and soldiers who carried out the massacre on trial. A great deal has been written in Israel concerning the fallout from this event inside the army, but few studies have investigated its consequences for relations between the state and its Arab citizens. To investigate the responsibility of the political and military Israeli leadership or the long-term objectives of what happened would require a special study and documents which are still unavailable to researchers. Here, the Kafr Qasim massacre is seen within the framework of the routine policy of Israeli repression since the end of the 1948 war, with its incidents of killing and terrorizing the Arab population.

The relationship between the Nakba in 1948 and the Kafr Qasim massacre became clear from the testimonies of some of those accused of participating in that crime. There is also a clear relationship between the killing of so-called infiltrators by the dozens, or hundreds, each year by soldiers with “itchy trigger fingers” and the killing of the Kafr Qasim villagers. Israeli soldiers in general and the Border Guards in particular had become used to killing Palestinians on both sides of the border without anyone being held accountable or punished for those crimes. This same policy had been implemented from time to time inside Arab villages in the Triangle and the Galilee. Consequently, the Border Guards in 1956 found nothing unusual in killing civilians who were returning to their homes in Kafr Qasim, nor did they think it illegal, particularly since they had received orders from their commanders to do so.

Among the series of retaliatory Israeli actions against targets in the West Bank, the operation in Qalqilya on the night of 10 October 1956 holds a special place because of its proximity to Kafr Qasim in location and time, two weeks prior.¹²⁵ ‘Arif al-‘Arif allocated special importance to the struggle of the inhabitants of that border city and their role in the 1948 war, and he devoted much space to the discussion of the bloody Israeli retaliatory act in October 1956 as a chapter in the struggle to hold onto the land.¹²⁶ Some Israeli leaders were apparently convinced that it was possible to cause the population of the southern Triangle to migrate under the smokescreen of the war in Sinai. Indeed, after the Qalqilya operation—which proved very costly to the Israeli side—its preparations for a war in the region increased.

Conditions in the Kingdom of Jordan under the young King Hussein were unstable. The parliamentary opposition, led by Sulayman al-Nabulsi, had won a majority. The government terminated the services of Glubb Pasha (Chief of Staff General John Bagot Glubb) and began coordinating with other Arab countries to safeguard its borders. With the beginning of summer 1956, the drums of war began to beat on the Israeli side, particularly after the costly Qalqilya operation, and a clash between the two sides seemed likely soon. The villages of the Triangle sensed that atmosphere and feared the results. When war broke out on the Egyptian front, far from the region, the tension and expectations of battles on the Jordanian front as well gave rise to the massacre in Kafr Qasim.

Operation Mole (“hafarperet” in Hebrew) was devised, according to which the army was supposed to expel the Arab population in the southern Triangle from their homes if war were to break out near the end of 1956. The researcher Ruvik Rosenthal uncovered some details of this plan, for which the army conducted exercises, and he believes that it was a cause of and the backdrop for the mindset which made the soldiers kill innocent civilians as though it was something ordinary.¹²⁷ According to this plan, the soldiers were to move the Arab inhabitants from their villages near the border in the southern Triangle to detention camps.¹²⁸ The available information on the planned operation reveals that the army looked on the Arabs as enemies who could be shoved into the camps. If we add to that the mood that was dominant in the ranks of the army, particularly the Border Guards, we can explain why they did not hesitate to fire on ordinary citizens returning from their fields to their homes. Those soldiers had become accustomed over the years to killing Arabs along the border, and they had no compunction against expelling them from their homes (according to Operation Mole) or opening fire on them and killing them when ordered to.

The Kafr Qasim massacre was the most shocking murder of Arab citizens after the 1948 war. Contrary to retaliation operations against Palestinian villages in the West Bank (Qibya, for example), the Kafr Qasim villagers were unarmed citizens of Israel who had not been charged with anything, and their basic transgression was to return home after the start of a curfew which they knew nothing about. This massacre, which was carried out by soldiers in the uniforms of

Israeli security forces, gave rise to condemnations which the government could not ignore. The Arab residents of Israel, who had become inured to the killing of those accused of infiltration, saw this massacre as crossing all red lines. The killing of dozens of innocents evoked memories of Dayr Yasin and the other massacres of 1948. Others saw it as worse and uglier because it was carried out by members of the Border Guards in official uniform under military orders from their superiors. The Kafr Qasim massacre was a lamentable event in the memory of residents of the Triangle, particularly those who remained in Israel after the Nakba.

CONCLUSION

The stories of individuals and villages presented in this chapter reflect the conditions of the difficult daily life of those who remained, and the bloody events which they endured. Even after the end of the war, Israeli policy sought for many years to reduce the number of Arab citizens and to expropriate the largest possible amount of their lands. This policy did not always achieve its goals because those who remained did not surrender to what the government and its institutions had planned for them. In many cases they proved that they could challenge that policy and defeat it. The stories of the residents of three Arab villages who returned to their homes ('Ilabun, 'Illut, and Kufr Qari) are examples of challenge and success in overcoming that general policy. Despite the weakness of the Arab residents and their isolation, they succeeded in enduring on their lands until the voices of the governments demanding their expulsion fell silent. In this context, the Kafr Qasim massacre occupies an important place in the drama of challenge and endurance. Despite the horrific nature of the massacre, the residents of Kafr Qasim and neighboring villages did not think of leaving their homes and migrating.

Those who remained in Israel under the shadow of a general policy occasionally found a narrow margin of possibility to overcome that policy. The way in which those who remained took advantage of those opportunities breaks the static black-and-white mold employed in most studies of the 1948 war and of Israel's war on so-called infiltrators in the 1950s. The stories of people and of villages represent a living example of local history—placing the Palestinians as human beings at the center of attention, rather than a symbol of lost cause and usurped collective rights. It also sheds light on the other side of Israeli historical literature, which basically recounts the victors' heroism without looking at the other side's tragedy; it speaks of the success of Palestinian villages and individuals in triumphing over policies of repression and expulsion. The Palestinians were not just powerless and hapless victims; often they were successful in defining their own destiny, in refusing to surrender to what others had planned for them.

The struggle and endurance of those to remain in their homes and their estranged homeland continued up to 1956, at least. Even the residents of villages which were not depopulated or severely damaged during the war found themselves

in its aftermath fighting to keep their lands in al-Battuf plain, al-Shaghur villages, and elsewhere. Having gotten hold of the lands of refugees and those it had forcibly expelled, Israel and its settler institutions focused on expropriating the lands of those who remained—under the pretext of security and development. In this respect, there was little difference between the villagers of the Triangle or the Galilee or other regions; the villagers of the Triangle suffered because of their proximity to the Jordanian border due to a policy of repression and expulsion which reached its climax in the 1956 Kafr Qasim massacre. But the seeds of that horrific crime were embodied in the villages of the “border strip” between Wadi ‘Ara and Kafr Qasim years before the event itself.