



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Homeland Lost is a photographic essay that juxtaposes portraits of individual Palestinian exiles and their families with present day images of the places they left in 1948. The project took two years to complete and has entailed extensive work in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, along with painstaking research inside the Green Line to accurately identify the exact geographical location of the subjects' homes or villages in 1948.

Decades of media reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have emphasized political, military and terrorist events, largely ignoring the individual experiences of Palestinian exiles and Arab Israelis. Homeland Lost presents portraits of stateless Palestinians living in refugee camps, Palestinian exiles settled in Jordan and Lebanon with citizenship in those countries and Palestinians living in the Israeli state. The subjects reflect the diversity of the diaspora population in gender, class, age and religion and the photographs as a group portray a society in exile.

The portraits in Homeland Lost are paired with landscapes showing the sites of the homes and villages from which the subjects originated. These images record the transformation of the former Palestinian landscape. Many of the houses, villages and agricultural lands have been allowed to fall into ruin, replaced by development or converted to new uses, and old names of places have been erased.

The act of pairing individual with place of origin is central to the exhibition concept. By looking at individual circumstances, the exhibition investigates the changing nature of the "homeland" discourse, which has been central to the formation of Palestinian identity in exile.

Palestinians refer to the events in 1948 that led to the creation of Israel as al-nakba, the catastrophe, to emphasize the suffering caused by dispersal, exile, alienation and denial. Almost 60 years after al-nakba, many older Palestinian exiles still long for lost houses, villages, communities, land, orchards and olive trees as well as the more abstract "homeland." They have built their lives around the dream of return, keeping keys,

maps and entitlement cards from many years ago, as symbols of ownership and loss. Fulfilment of the "right of return" enshrined in UN resolution 194 became their vision of the future.

However, to younger generations, without personal memory or contact with the homeland, dreams and hopes of a return are fading – the homeland in concrete terms long ago lost its significance and survives only as a symbol to gather around in the land of exile. Many are 'integrated' into host societies to the extent that a return would not affect their personal circumstances. Moreover, the progressive transformation of the former Arab landscape within Israel raises the question of whether there is anything recognisable to return to.

Homeland Lost records the disappearance of a particular historical landscape and thereby provokes discussion about the meaning of 'homeland' and 'return' for the Palestinian diaspora today. The project speaks of the heartbreaking difficulty of facing up to the impossibility of restoring a past that has ceased to exist and raises the question of imagining an alternative future: the fact remains that there are 4.3 million UNRWA refugees who remain stateless fifty-seven years after the events that drove them into exile.

Sponsored by the British Council, Homeland Lost is an exhibition of 60 black and white medium format images sized 16 x 16". It will be exhibited in June 2006 at the al Ma'mal Centre in East Jerusalem.



ZEINAB AL'SAKAH

*Lives in Burj el'Barajneh
Refugee Camp, Lebanon.
Originally from al'Nahr.*

*Shown wearing her wedding dress, the only possession
she brought with her from Palestine in 1948*



AL'NAHR, DISTRICT OF ACRE

*Village remains with
remnants of military
activity in 1948.*

*With 120 houses and an exclusively Arab population of
610 in 1948, al'Nahr was mostly destroyed immediately
after the occupation. All the inhabitants fled the village
during the war and were not permitted to return.*



SANA BKHEIT

*Lives in Gaza City,
Gaza Born 1984, Gaza.*

Mother from Kawkaba. Participated in the 800 metre event at the Athens Olympics, 2004



KAWKABA, DISTRICT OF GAZA

*Site of former village,
now Israeli agricultural
lands.*

With 121 houses and an exclusively Arab population of 680 in 1948, Kawkaba has been completely defaced. All the inhabitants fled the village during the war and were not permitted to return.



MOHAMED HAWARI, SON KHALIL AND GRAND-DAUGHTER SIREEN

*Mohamed born 1924
Haifa, obtained Lebanese
passport 1957. Khalil born
1947, Haifa.*

Worked for BP in Aden, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.



HAIFA CITY, DISTRICT OF HAIFA

*Mount al-Karmel
section of Haifa.*

Haifa surrendered to Israeli forces in April 1948. Many Palestinians escaped by sea to Tyre, Beirut and Acre City. Of the 61,000 Palestinian Arabs who lived in Haifa in 1948, only 3,566 remained. In 1948 Haifa was a mixed race city of 224,630 with 85,590 Muslim Arabs, 30,200 Christian Arabs and 104,510 Jews.



RIMA MULHIM

*Lives in Amman, Jordan.
Born 1958, Amman.*

Parents lived in Jaffa until 1948, when they were forced out and resided in Nablus and then Jerusalem. Works for the United Nations.



AL-MANSHYYAH, DISTRICT OF JAFFA

Neighbourhood remains

al-Manshiyya was a neighbourhood of Jaffa, located to the north of the city centre. A large portion of the Arab section of Jaffa was demolished during the 1948 war, including most of al-Manshiyya. Part of the neighbourhood was converted to a public park. Inhabitants of Jaffa fled the war by sea to Gaza, 'Areash (Egypt) and Beirut. Some fled inland to al-Ramla and al-Lydd, while the better off went to Jerusalem and Amman. Of the 70,000 Palestinians who lived in Jaffa in 1948, only 3,650 remained.



HASSAN AL'ALEEMI

Lives in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, West Bank. Born in Dheisheh Refugee Camp.

Grandfather owned 50 dunums of land in Zakariyya, now the site of a moshav. Works as a journalist.



ZAKARRIYYA, DISTRICT OF HEBRON

Remains of a mosque.

With 189 houses and an exclusively Arab population of 1,180 in 1948, Zakariyya was partially destroyed and all the remaining houses became the property of the Jewish National Fund and the Israeli government. Some Kurdish or Khazari Jews have taken residence in some of the houses. The last inhabitants were forced out of the village in 1950 and were not permitted to return. Many of the villagers still live in Dheisheh and al-Aroub refugee camps in Bethlehem and Hebron and some have moved to al-Ramla.



ABDEL KADER MOUED

*Lives in Ein Hilweh
Refugee Camp, Lebanon.
Originally from
Saffuriyya.*



SAFFURIYYA, DISTRICT OF NAZARETH

*Remains of monastery of
Saint Anna on northern
side of village, now an
orphanage for
Palestinian children.*

With 747 houses and an exclusively Arab population of 4,330 mixed in 1948, Saffuriyya has been mostly destroyed and only a few houses and archaeological sites remain. All the inhabitants fled the village during the war, although some remained as Palestinian-Israeli citizens in Nazareth.



ABU FAISAL HAYEL ATTEH KHALIF

Lives in Bourj Schmeli
Refugee Camp, Lebanon.

Born 1928, al-Zuq al-Tahtani, served in British Army. Shown
holding certificate of discharge from Palestinian Police Force



AL-ZUQ AL-TAHTANI, DISTRICT OF SAFAD

Village ruins.

With 137 houses and a population of 1,050 in 1948 (with some
Jewish land ownership), al-Zuq al-Tahtani has been mostly
destroyed and only a few houses remain. All the inhabitants
fled the village during the war and have not been permitted
to return.



FAWZI MAHMOUD AL-TANJI

Lives in Tulkarm Refugee Camp, West Bank. Born in al'Tantura.

Survived al'Tantura massacre, 1948. Shown holding British Mandate identity card.



AL'TANTURA, DISTRICT OF HAIFA

Remains of a fortress.

With 202 houses and a population of 1,490 Arabs in 1948 (with some Jewish land ownership), al'Tantura has been mostly destroyed and only a few houses remain. An Israeli historian has found evidence of a massacre of up to 200 village inhabitants in 1948. Some residents fled to the Triangle, while approximately 1,200 were expelled to nearby al-Furaydis.