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## 50 Years on and Stones in an Unfinished Wall

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## Fifty Years On / Stones in an Unfinished Wall

### *For Palestine*

**Lisa Suhair Majaj**

**1.**

Fifty years on  
I am trying to tell the story  
of what was lost  
before my birth

the story of what was there

before the stone house fell  
    mortar blasted loose  
    rocks carted away for new purposes, or smashed  
    the land declared clean, empty

before the oranges bowed in grief  
blossoms sifting to the ground like snow  
quickly melting

before my father clamped his teeth  
    hard  
    on the pit of exile  
slammed shut the door to his eyes

before tears turned to disbelief  
disbelief to anguish  
anguish to helplessness  
helplessness to rage  
rage to despair

before the cup was filled  
raised forcibly to our lips

fifty years on  
    I am trying to tell the story  
    of what we are still losing

**2.**

I am trying to find a home in history  
but there is no more space in the books  
for exiles

the arbiters of justice  
have no time

for the dispossessed  
without credentials

and what good are words  
when there is no page  
for the story?

**3.**  
the aftersong filters down  
like memory  
    echo of ash

history erased the names  
of four hundred eighteen villages  
emptied, razed

but cactus still rims the perimeters  
emblem of what will not stay hidden

In the Jaffa district alone:

*Al-'Abbasiyya*  
*Abu Kishk*  
*Bayt Dajan*  
*Biyar 'Adas*  
*Fajja*  
*Al-Haram*  
*Ijlil al-Qibliyya*  
*Ijlil al-Shamaliyya*  
*al-Jammasin al-Gharbi*  
*al-Jammasin al-Sharqi*  
*Jarisha*  
*Kafr 'Ana*  
*al-Khayriyya*  
*al-Mas'udiyya*  
*al-Mirr*  
*al-Muwaylih*  
*Ranitya*  
*al-Safiriyya*  
*Salama*  
*Saqiya*  
*al-Sawalima*  
*al-Shaykh Muwannis*  
*Yazur*

*all that remains*  
*a scattering of stones and rubble*  
*across a forgotten landscape*

fifty years on  
the words push through

    a splintered song  
    forced out one note  
        at a time

## 4.

The immensity of loss  
shrouds everything

in despair  
we seek the particular

light angling gently  
in single rays

*the houses of Dayr Yasin  
were built of stone, strongly built  
with thick walls*

*a girls' school a boys' school a bakery  
two guest-houses a social club a thrift fund  
three shops four wells two mosques*

a village of stone cutters  
a village of teachers and shopkeepers

an ordinary village  
with a peaceful reputation

until the massacre

*carried out without discriminating  
among men and women  
children and old people*

in the aftermath  
light remembers

light searches out the hidden places  
fills every crevice

light peers through windows  
slides across neatly swept doorsteps  
finds the hiding places of the children

light slips into every place  
where the villagers were killed  
the houses, the streets, the doorways  
light traces the bloodstains

light glints off the trucks  
that carried the men through the streets  
like sheep before butchering

light pours into the wells  
where they threw the bodies

light seeks out the places where sound  
was silenced

light streams across stone  
light stops at the quarry

5.

near Qisraya, circa 1938  
a fisherman leans forward,  
flings his net  
across a sea slightly stirred  
by wind

to his left  
land tumbles  
rocky blurred  
to his right  
sky is hemmed  
by an unclear  
horizon

(ten years  
before the *Nakbeh* --

the future  
already closing  
down)

6.

fifty years later  
shock still hollows the throats  
of those driven out

*without water, we stumbled into the hills*

*a small child lay beside the road  
sucking the breast of its dead mother*

*outside Lydda  
soldiers ordered everyone  
to throw all valuables onto a blanket*

*one young man refused*

*almost casually,  
the soldier pulled up his rifle  
shot the man*

*he fell, bleeding and dying  
his bride screamed and cried*

he fell to the earth  
they fell in despair to the earth

the earth held them  
the earth soaked up their cries

their cries sank into the soil  
 filtered into underground streams

fifty springs on  
 their voices still rise from the earth

fierce as the poppies  
 that cry from the hills each spring

in remembrance

**7.**

some stories are told in passing  
 barely heard in the larger anguish

among those forced out  
 was a mother with two babies

one named Yasmine  
 and another  
 whose name no one remembers  
 her life so short  
 even its echo  
 is forgotten

the nameless child died on the march

it was a time of panic  
 no one could save a small girl

and so her face crumpled  
 lost beneath the weight of earth

I know only that she loved the moon  
 that lying ill on her mother's lap  
 she cried inconsolably  
 wanted to hold it in her hands

a child  
 she didn't know Palestine  
 would soon shine  
     unreachable  
 as the moon

**8.**

the river floods its banks  
 littering the troubled landscape

we pick our way amid shards  
 heir to a generation  
     that broke their teeth on the bread of exile  
     that cracked their hearts on the stone of exile  
     necks bent beneath iron keys to absent doors

their lamentations  
an unhealed wound

*I was forced to leave my village  
but the village refused to abandon me  
my blood is there  
my soul is flying in the sky over the old streets*

fifty years on

soul still seeks a sky

9.

the walls were torn down long ago  
homes demolished  
rebuilding forbidden

but the stones remain

someone dug them from the soil  
with bare hands  
carried them across the fields

someone set the stones  
in place on the terraced slope

someone planted trees,  
dug wells

someone still waits in the fields all night  
humming the old songs quietly

someone watches stars chip darkness  
into dawn

someone remembers  
how stone holds dew through the summer night

how stone  
waits for the thirsty birds

The italicized sections of this poem are taken,  
in most cases verbatim, from historical and journalistic sources.

The listing of destroyed villages and the passage beginning  
"All that remains" in section 3 is taken from Walid Khalidi's  
*All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*  
(Washington D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

The description of Deir Yassin in section 4 is taken from  
the Deir Yassin OnLine Information Center (<http://www.deiryassin.org/>).

Section 5 refers to a photo in *All That Remains*.

The description of refugees leaving Lydda in section 6  
is taken from Father Audeh Rantisi's *Blessed are the Peacemakers*:

*The History of a Palestinian Christian*

(cited on <http://www.alnakba.org/testimony/audeh.htm>).

The passage beginning "I was forced to leave my village"  
in section 8 is taken from a Reuters report by Nidal al-Mughrabi, April 14, 1998.