



From Seferberlik to the Nakba

A Personal Account of the Life of Zahra al-Ja'uniyya

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Zahra al-Ja'uniyya in an identity card photo taken later in life. Her face is tattooed in the tradition of some women in the Upper Galilee region. *Source: Nazmi al-Jubeh*

My grandmother Zahra passed away at the age of over 70 on 6 March, 1968. Like most people of her generation, her exact birthday is unknown. However, we do know it falls near the end of the nineteenth century, perhaps in 1897. Even the date of her marriage to my grandfather, Salim Hajj Krayyim, is not known exactly because it is not recorded in any Islamic law court (*mahkama shar'iyya*) registrar or family documents.¹

What I learned from stories told by my father and paternal aunts is that Zahra al-Sayyed moved from her parent's house in al-Ja'uni to that of her husband (my grandfather, Salim) in Majd al-Kroum, during World War I. Thereafter, she became known among the villagers as 'al-Ja'uniyya' (i.e., from Ja'uni).

When al-Ja'uniyya married my grandfather she was about 18. Despite this young age, she had already been married once, at the start of WWI, and had been widowed shortly thereafter.² As for my grandfather Salim, he

was already a grown man in his forties when he married my grandmother Zahra. He had been married twice before, and had one son named Fayyad, who was older than his new bride. The details of their marriage are interesting and shed light on important aspects of the social structure of Palestinian villages and rural marriages in that era.

My grandmother never learned to read or write, because Ja'uni, like the majority of villages in Palestine, had not opened schools for boys—much less for girls—at that time. However, because she lived close to Jewish families in Ja'uni-Rosh Pina, she learned some Hebrew, which came in handy later in her life after the *Nakba* of 1948, when she became a citizen of the state of Israel.³ My grandfather, Salim, died before reaching the age of 60. Zahra bore him three children and after his death, the burden of providing for them fell to her. Hence, some 10 years after her second marriage, Zahra al-Ja'uniyya found herself a widow once again, far from her family and hometown.

Two or three years after the death of my grandfather, Zahra married one of his relatives, Abu Ma'youf, in order to protect herself from rumour and assault. However, my grandmother's life in this new “home” was neither easy nor comfortable. She bore four children to her third husband, in addition to helping raise Abu Ma'youf's children from his first wife. As for her children from my grandfather Salim, despite their young ages, Zahra was forced to leave them behind in their deceased father's house. My father, Hussein, was the youngest and I heard a lot about his life under the care of his brother, who was six years older than him.⁴

I became close to my grandmother when she was already over 55 years old—long after the Israelis executed her husband Abu Ma'youf by firing squad on 6 November, 1948 and demolished his home.⁵ Even though she was in her late fifties, the beauty of her face and her poise shone through until the last days of her life. At that time, my grandmother lived in a little shack far from our former house near the old mosque of Majd al-Kroum.

I was not given the chance to hear my grandmother's stories, like most children. She did not live nearby, but rather far, next to her youngest son, my uncle Ahmad. However, I did hear some of her life stories in bits and pieces from my father and aunts before my grandmother's death, and many other stories after she died. As my interest in history grew, and as I dug deeper into the events of the *Nakba* in our village, my aunt Sa'da became a crucial source of oral information about my grandmother and about her life in both Majd al-Kroum and her hometown of Ja'uni.⁶

By interviewing dozens of elderly people from our village, Majd al-Kroum, I discovered that Mohammad Haidar “Abu Jamil” had kept a written record of the most important events that had befallen the village since the start of the British Mandate. This record contained general and detailed information about life in the village and

its inhabitants. In Abu Jamil's record, there are some birth dates and most—if not all—deaths, in addition to marriage contracts, village arguments and other events. Such a local archive is rare in Palestine's countryside. It contained extremely valuable information about my grandmother, my family, and other villagers in the time of the British Mandate.⁷

The information in Abu Jamil's record corroborates some oral accounts, filling in dates, numbers, and details. My observations and personal memories of my grandmother merge with gathered oral accounts, as well as Abu Jamil's written records. Thus, the sources on which my grandmother's story is based are unique in their exclusiveness, detail and comprehensiveness.

This paper traces the key episodes in the life of an ordinary peasant woman—something rarely documented in books or historical narratives, which usually revolve around elite individuals and political leaders. It also sheds light on aspects of social and cultural life that remains to this day in the shadows of conventional histories of Palestine's peasant population and other marginalized social groups. Furthermore, this paper focuses on the lot of Palestinian women, who are usually absent in historical accounts of the Nakba and other catastrophes that befell the Palestinians. In short, my grandmother's story opens a new window to Palestine's social history, especially that before the Nakba. I hope others will follow the same path, in order to provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Palestinian social and cultural life. This paper is a model for a local bottom-up micro-history, in contrast with the overall comprehensive political histories abundant in Arabic libraries. At the same time, the biographical account of my grandmother is integrated with the macro socio-political history of Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Beginning of the Road

My grandfather, Salim Hajj Krayyim "Abu Fayyad", travelled regularly to Damascus and Huran at the start of the twentieth century. On the way there, he usually stopped over in Ja'uni, which afforded him a safe haven to rest from his travels and the difficult mountain road before continuing on, usually on horseback. It was in this modest village, Ja'uni, where Salim Hajj met the father of my grandmother, Zahra al-Sayyed. This friendship between the two men strengthened as a consequence of these repeated trips, ongoing until the tragic years of the First World War. The elderly recall how the Ottomans recruited young men and led them to the battlefield far from their homes and countries.⁸ After the outbreak of the war in November, 1914, the Ottomans also drafted Salim's son Fayyad, who was in his early twenties, even though he was an only child and was married with a small baby.

A few months after he was sent to Damascus, Fayyad escaped and took shelter in the home of his father's friend in Ja'uni. My grandmother's father had a warehouse close to the family home filled with straw and hay. Fayyad hid there for several months until the Ottomans grew tired of searching for him. During that time, Fayyad got sick and my grandmother Zahra and her sister Sa'da would take turns bringing him food and water. The two young women also helped their mother nurse the ill man and bring down his fever. Fayyad never forgot those months of hiding out in his father's friend's home, even long after he returned to his home and family in Majd al-Kroum.⁹ In particular, Fayyad did not forget Sa'da and Zahra, two young women full of youth and beauty, both a few years younger than him.

About six months after Fayyad resettled with his family, he asked his father to ask for Sa'da's hand in marriage. This was not an ordinary request in those days. The war was not yet over and families were suffering from a scarcity of food, along with a locust scourge, illnesses and the other afflictions of war. Moreover, Fayyad was already married with a small child. His wife was the same age as he was, so why did he want to take a second wife? Also, what would his in-laws and the other villagers say of this, especially in those days when there was so much tragedy and sadness. But Fayyad had fallen in love with Sa'da and continued to pressure his father until he convinced him to go with him to Ja'uni to ask for Sa'da's hand.

Grandmother Zahra's family received their two guests warmly, grateful for all of the gifts Abu Fayyad carried with him.¹⁰ In the evening, after dinner, the host was surprised by his guest's request for Sa'ada's hand in marriage to his son Fayyad.

"Sa'ada has been engaged to the village mukhtar for some time," he told his guest. "Anyway, your son Fayyad is married with children. Why doesn't he marry Zahra, who is a widow with no children and is only two years older than her sister?"

Fayyad was in love with Sa'da, however, and could not be swayed to marry Zahra, the widow, despite her youth and beauty. Then my grandfather Salim shocked his host again by asking for Zahra's hand in marriage for himself. The two men agreed and Abu Fayyad went home the next day with his young wife, who was younger than his only son from his current wife.¹¹

When she moved from her father's house to her new home in Majd al-Kroum, Zahra al-Ja'uniyya became the lady of Abu Fayyad's house, with no competition or harassment. Jalilah, Fayyad's mother, was in her late forties like her husband. Zahra found in her a mother figure, which somewhat compensated for being away from her own parents. Jalilah kept Zahra good company in her new home. Jalilah, on the other hand, who had not had children for many years, was overjoyed by having little ones nearby. Zahra gave birth to one child after another.

In Abu Fayyad's home, Jalilah was more like a grandmother than a co-mother to Zahra's children. As for Zahra, she treated Um Fayyad like a mother and never made her feel like the 'scorned lesser wife'. In the years after WWI my grandfather lived in near-paradise with his wife and small children, who brought hope, happiness and new life to the two-story house. Our family stories portray an almost perfect picture of those years, in which there was no jealousy or envy in the Abu Fayyad home. In the time that the Ottoman empire came to an end and the British occupation commenced (which was seen at first as a good omen for the region and its people), everything seemed to be going well for Zahra al-Ja'uniyya, as she settled in her new home and built a new family for herself .

This happiness did not last long. Her husband fell ill and was bedridden for a long time. Modern medicine was rare in the Palestinian countryside and smaller cities. Abu Fayyad was first treated with herbs and popular remedies in the hope that the illness would pass. However, his condition grew worse until he could no longer get out of bed to perform the simplest of tasks. Nonetheless, Zahra became pregnant with my father, having given birth to 'Ali and Aminah years before. Everyone took the pregnancy, and later the birth of Hussein, as a good sign. Still Abu Fayyad only grew sicker. He was still bedridden a year and a half after the birth of his youngest son, and then passed away.¹²

Zahra al-Ja'uniyya was widowed for the second time before she turned 30, now with three children, the youngest (my father Hussein) not yet two, and the eldest nearly eight. Living standards and money were not Zahra's main concern back then. Abu Fayyad had left her a big house and vast lands with fig and olive orchards that provided an ample income for her and her children. However, rural society was not used to a young widow taking care of her family properties without a man to protect her. Hence, less than a year after Abu Fayyad's death, her parents came from Ja'uni to bring their daughter home. They were not so well off to be able to take on the burden of their widowed daughter and her three children. Still, they went to the Manna' family guest house (*diwan*) to voice their fears and get advice on how to safeguard their daughter's honour, as well as to show readiness to take their daughter back and assume the burden of supporting her and her children.

Zahra was well aware of her family's financial situation. She also preferred her spacious and comfortable home to life in one room with her children in Ja'uni near her parents. Fayyad, who had never forgotten the role Zahra and her family played in protecting and caring for him when he was a deserter and sick in their barn knew how his father's widow felt. Along with some family elders, he thanked my grandmother's family and reassured them that their daughter would be safe and would come to no harm in her home among her new family. Her family was convinced and thus bid their daughter and her children farewell. They returned to Ja'uni after carrying out their duty.

The Individual and the Public

Still, time proved it difficult to end the problematic situation of protecting a beautiful widow who was desired by several men. Words, winks and rumours became constant pressures in Zahra's life; she had no husband to protect her and stop the wagging tongues. This problem only escalated, especially after Zahra turned down some less than tempting marriage proposals from men older than herself (notably, not unlike her late husband Abu Fayyad had been). Many of the villagers saw this as obstinacy and a challenge from a woman outsider who was better off accepting the protection of a husband, even if he was old. However, Zahra insisted on managing her own home, even though she understood the risks of this position.¹³

The house where my grandmother lived with her three children is directly adjacent to the village mosque and a number of neighbours' homes. I remember that I and some neighbourhood friends would jump from one rooftop to another to play and visit with each other, instead of going down into the alleyways and narrow streets between the village's old homes. This phenomenon of building village homes directly up against each other was one way of creating a natural barrier against attacks on the village by outsiders.¹⁴ However, it also allowed village's hoodlums to use these rooftops for illicit purposes, including break-ins and assaults against women. These facts were not lost on my grandmother Zahra, who took the necessary precautions of bolting some of her windows and fortifying her house.

One night, my grandmother heard a light tapping on the wooden door leading to her room. When she asked who was there, the man standing behind the door did not give his name, but asked her in a low voice to open the door. My grandmother responded by picking up an iron coffee grinder and opening the door with the other hand. But before she could strike the man on the head with the coffee grinder, he had escaped to the rooftops and disappeared into the night. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I heard stories of my grandmother's courage and strength of character, which explained her endurance in the face of the many challenges of her life.

Nevertheless, Fayyad and his relatives took other precautions and decided not to leave Hajj Salim Krayyim's widow alone to fend for herself. After all, her oldest child was not yet 10 years old.

When an intruder tried again to violate the sanctity of Zahra al-Ja'uniyya's home, he fell into the trap set for him in cooperation with two policemen. Hussein Khalil was captured on 13 September, 1929 and was detained in Acre Prison until his court date.¹⁵ Khalil Hussein was then tried on charges of assaulting Zahra al-Ja'uniyya and her home. He was convicted and sentenced to just six months in jail.¹⁶ The Manna' family felt that this sentence was much lighter than it should have been and decided

to pursue the perpetrator after he was released in 1930. Hussein paid no heed to the threats that were made and did not accept the traditional demand that he leave the village, even if for a limited period of time. This stubbornness was seen as a challenge and a provocation, and the relationship between the two extended families grew tense. Fights and conflicts between them broke out, peaking in the killing of Khalil, Hussein's father, who attacked Zahra's house, on 23 July, 1931 on the land of Qalous.¹⁷

This incident and others like it fed more disputes that extended over generations between the wider family of the attacker and the Manna' family. Other families in the village took sides, while still others tried to intervene to stop the fighting. This split extending even into the British Mandate period. Such family feuds were a key factor in weakening the cohesiveness of Palestinian communities despite external dangers, especially during the 1936-1939 rebellion. Indeed, the depth and dimensions of this social phenomenon far surpass that time and place and have influenced Palestinian society before and after 1948.¹⁸

How was Zahra al-Ja'uniyya affected by the events that were taking place around her? My grandmother's family returned from Ja'uni after Hussein Khalil was imprisoned to again ask for permission to bring their daughter home. And again, Zahra preferred to live in Majd al-Kroum over returning to her hometown. However, this time she agreed to accept the proposal of Mohammed Hajj "Abu Ma'yuf" to protect her and her children from attackers and wagging tongues. Thus, 1930 began a new period in the lives of my grandmother and her children, the youngest of which was my father. Zahra al-Ja'uniyya lived with her third and last husband for 18 years until his execution during the Nakba. My grandmother bore her new husband four children—Sa'da, Amneh, Sameeh and Ahmad. She was now mother to seven children from her two husbands.

Although Zahra al-Ja'uniyya's life was becoming more stable, Majd al-Kroum, like other villages and cities in Palestine, had been living through difficult times since the close of the 1920s. Relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine were tense from the end of 1928, reaching their nadir in the summer of 1929, when dozens of Jews were killed in Hebron. These bloody events also shook up the relatively neighbourly relations between Arabs and Jews in Safad, Tiberias and other towns. So, while Zahra was facing difficulties in her personal life, she also feared the political implications for her family in Ja'uni, who had lived side-by-side with the Jews of Rosh Pina ever since that Jewish settlement was established in 1882.

Other commonplace events, ones rarely discussed in the political history of the country, also made those days difficult. On 23 February, 1928, for instance, Abu Jamil recorded that "there was an earthquake on Thursday" which occurred as he was in "Shaykh Nabhan's house in the company of Hussein al-Siba'i and Mohammad al-Nasrawi".¹⁹ It seems that the earthquake itself did not do massive damage that

day. It did, however, shake the foundations and rooftops of rural homes dating back to the days of Dhahir ‘Umar al-Zaydani.²⁰ The damage caused by the earthquake became apparent only later on, about a year later in January 1929, when “over 50 [second] stories began to collapse.” That year’s winter was particularly harsh, and later generations began to compare subsequent winters to that one, when the rainwater and floods “filled up the valleys and lowlands.”²¹ Then, as if the earthquake, the destruction of homes and the subsequent winter were not enough for the villagers, locusts descended on the village on 18 April, 1930. These were some of the crises my grandmother faced alongside the other people of the village, and which were recorded by Abu Jamil in his book, which made no distinction between the individual and the public.

Following are several other examples of the many public events recorded in Abu Jamil’s book; these show the connection between rural life and that of neighbouring cities. A record on 13 April, 1929 reports the death of Abdul Fattah Effendi al-Sa’di, a member of the Ottoman parliament during WWI and later on, Acre’s mayor during the early 1920s.²² Then, on 30 August, 1929, Abu Jamil mentioned “the revolt between the Jews and the Muslims”, indicating the struggle over the Western [*Buraq*] Wall and the violence in Jerusalem, Hebron and other locations across Palestine. As we know, these events had several ramifications, some of which were associated with the actions of the country’s British rulers. Abu Jamil documented these as “the execution of three men destined to become symbols of Palestinian resistance to foreign occupation: Mohammad Jamjum, ‘Ata al-Zeer and Fu’ad Hijazi in Acre on Tuesday, 17 June, 1930”. Two or three lines in Abu Jamil’s record were dedicated to this event, which took place close to Majd al-Kroum.²³

My grandmother told Abu Ma’yuf of her condition for marriage, which was that she remain in her house with her children so she would not have to live with his first wife and their children in his house. This was not a difficult condition for Abu Ma’yuf to accept. He divided his days and nights between the two houses and two wives, and relatives in Ja’uni and Majd al-Kroum were all comfortable with these arrangements. Most importantly, Zahra was no longer a widow without support, which some believed had made her easy prey for those who wanted to attack her at night.

My grandmother Zahra was in her early thirties and she quickly became pregnant with Abu Ma’yuf’s child. She had four children with him, one after the other. But Abu Ma’yuf, who now spent most of his days and nights in Zahra’s house, began to complain about her “little devils”—her children from Salim Hajj Krayyim, the youngest of which was my father Hussein (who was just seven years old when his mother remarried)—saying they were disturbing his rest. I have heard more than once and from more than one source about the following event that shattered Zahra al-Ja’uniyya’s peace with Abu Ma’yuf, resulting in her moving into Abu Ma’yuf’s house.

The olive season was a good one that year and everyone was busy storing oil and olives in the pantries and reserving the olive pits to fuel the stove and oven. While everyone was working and the children were playing, jumping and screaming, Abu Ma'yuf lost his temper. Hussein was playing with his brothers and he fell down into a large barrel of olive oil. Abu Ma'yuf then grabbed the boy by his hands and legs and lifted him above his head screaming, "I will kill you and rid myself of you!"

My grandmother panicked and started screaming in front of family and neighbours, "Look at my fate—this is their house and their olive oil and you want to kill the boy." Abu Ma'yuf quickly returned to his senses and put the boy down. But Hussein and his siblings and everyone else never forgot the incident.

Afterwards, Abu Ma'yuf decided to move Zahra al-Ja'uniyya to his house while leaving her children from Salim Hajj Krayyim in their deceased father's house. When Aminah was almost 16 and her brother 'Ali had turned 14, they were given the responsibility of taking care of themselves, the house, and their brother Hussein. My grandmother started to drop by periodically, especially since Abu Ma'yuf's house was close to her children's. Still, her mind was always on her teenage children. After a while, a solution was found, and Aminah and Ali were married to a brother and sister, and Hussein lived with his older brother 'Ali and his wife from 12 November, 1936.²⁴ It is said that the outbreak of the revolt was one of the factors that expedited the wedding because the grooms were affiliated with the rebels in their village, and their families were afraid they would be killed or imprisoned.²⁵

Zahra al-Ja'uniyya then threw herself into taking care of her household and children in Abu Ma'yuf's house and her children from Abu Fayyad became more stable Ali and Aminah's marriages. My grandmother was no longer a young woman. After WWII, she was over 40 and became engrossed in the everyday concerns of the pre-Nakba storm. During those years, my grandmother maintained her relationship with her family, who she visited with Abu Ma'yuf on holidays and special occasions. Abu-Ma'yuf thus became acquainted with the family's neighbours, including Mano Friedman. According to the family's oft-repeated narrative, Mano was the same age of my grandmother and, as good neighbours might, her mother nursed him, too. Mano grew up to become an important businessman and an officer in the Hagana. Since Abu Ma'yuf was also a tradesman in grains and cattle, he took part in some of Friedman's businesses during the mid-'40s, right up until the Nakba.²⁶

The Palestinian Nakba and its Ramifications

Before my grandmother's death, I never asked her opinion of the war in Palestine and its ramifications. The issue did not concern me at that age, even in the months that followed the defeat (*Naksa*) of June 1967. We can assume that most of Zahra al-Ja'uniyya's concerns were linked to her family, children and the other villagers. Ali, her oldest son who had been married since 1936, was still childless after more than ten years of marriage. His wife became pregnant three times but would lose the baby either before term or soon after its birth. His sister, Aminah, who married the same day as him, had two children and two miscarriages during the same time. My mother had also miscarried the first time before she was 18. Then my father, Hussein, married on 1 April, 1945 and moved in to the same house as Ali.²⁷ Everyone became increasingly negative, believing that Salim Hajj Krayyim's house directly adjacent to the mosque must be 'cursed'.

Zahra al-Ja'uniyya was likely busy with these worries when the United Nations issued its 29 November, 1947 resolution proposing the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. This partition plan put my grandmother's birthplace, Ja'uni, and other areas of the eastern Galilee inside the borders of the Jewish state. I don't think anyone asked my grandmother or her family what they thought about this. In any case, Palestinian and Arab leaders rejected the plan and threatened to go to war. Skirmishes then began, reminding people of the events of the revolt in Palestine 10 years earlier (1936-1939).

One of my grandmother's sons from Abu Ma'yuf, Samih, was 16 at the time when the fighting broke out. Despite his young age, he decided at the start of 1948 to join the rebellion. My grandmother and his father tried in vain to stop him, to no avail. A mother's heart never lies—just a few weeks after that, terrible news came from the village of Sha'ab that a landmine had exploded near Samih while he was in the hills with other fighters, killing him. Thus, my grandmother experienced the death of one of her children at the start of the war.²⁸

Then the war between the Arabs and Jews broke out in more than one location throughout Palestine. Units from the 'Salvation Army' arrived in the Galilee, and one took up a position in Majd al-Kroum.²⁹ Its members used one of Abu Ma'yuf's warehouses to store their supplies, and his courtyard as an encampment for volunteers. The choice of Abu Ma'yuf's house raised questions I have not sufficiently answered yet today. Was this selection a sort of reward for the 'father of the martyr'? And was Abu Ma'yuf's cooperation with the Salvation Army by choice or was he coerced into accepting (as is widely believed)? Did anyone ask Zahra al-Ja'uniyya her opinion about making her home a military warehouse and fort or was the wife only able to accept her husband's decision and obey him unquestioningly in such danger?

Whatever the answers, the fact remains that Abu Ma'yuf's cooperation with the Salvation Army cost him his life and his home. My grandmother was made to pay the high price of this for the rest of her life. An Israeli army unit entered the village from the west after an agreement that the people of Majd al-Kroum would surrender their weapons. The Israeli army, which posted some of its units in the village of Birwe, agreed in exchange not to take its revenge on the people of Majd al-Kroum and to turn a blind eye to the villagers' resistance and cooperation with the Salvation Army unit. The Israeli army adhered to this agreement, entering the village and collecting weapons from the villagers on 30 October, 1948. Most stories of the handover of arms mention Haim Orbach from Nahariya as a key mediator in reaching and implementing this agreement.³⁰ In any case, the first days of November passed peacefully.

Majd al-Kroum was one of the larger villages, to which hundreds of displaced refugees from nearby villages such as Birwe, Sha'ab, Damun and others came. Rumours were reaching the villagers about the massacres being carried out in 'Elaboun and other villages that had been recently occupied in the central and upper Galilee.³¹ But good relations between some villagers and 'Abu Zeev' (the abovementioned Haim Orbach) and with Jabr Dahesh Mu'adi and other Druze from Yarka reassured the village residents and convinced them to stay at home rather than flee. My grandmother and her neighbours lived those difficult days in waiting—fearful of the news coming from the east, and dependant upon old relations with people from the west, those who had helped to negotiate the handover agreement.

Less than a week after the village surrendered and handed over its weapons, another Israeli military unit arrived from the east. Its members were responsible for the massacres in 'Elaboun, Nahaf, Deir al-Asad, al-Bi'ana and other villages. This military unit surrounded the village and carried out a massacre in the courtyard of the village spring. The first of its victims was Abu Ma'yuf. The soldiers made him watch as they dynamited his home before shooting him in front of the townspeople.³² My family members retell this story as they heard it from my grandmother, who said "her heart knew" before the tragedy even occurred. The story goes that my grandmother, who feared revenge against her husband because of his cooperation with the Salvation Army, asked her 'nursing brother' Mano Freidman for help and protection for her and her family. It is also said that Mano did send a note in his handwriting in Hebrew to Zahra al-Ja'uniyya saying, "Please do not harm this good lady and her children." The story interprets the execution of Abu Ma'yuf and the demolition of his home as resulting from the cryptic words of the note, which excluded her husband and house. Did my grandmother show the note from Mano to the soldiers before her husband's execution and the demolition of her home? No one knows for sure.

I have confirmed that Mano Friedman did come in person to visit my grandmother and to offer his condolences over the loss of her husband and house after he heard the

news.³³ It is also said that my grandmother blamed him for not respecting their ‘family bond’, although Mano vehemently denied having any knowledge of what was to take place. At that time, my grandmother’s relatives in Ja’uni had already been displaced from their homes and fled to Syria in the summer of 1948. Mano proposed, according to the story, to send for them and convince them to return to their homes, saying that he would guarantee their protection. Were Mano Friedman’s words only a kind of condolence made to lessen the tragedy that had befallen Zahra al-Ja’uniyya, or was he serious in proposing and promising something that defies the general Palestinian narrative about the circumstances surrounding the Palestinian refugee problem? That narrative blames the Israeli side for ethnic cleansing carried out according to a Zionist plan for mass expulsion put in place before the eruption of the war.³⁴ Do this and other micro-history accounts prove something different? I don’t know, and it is far beyond the scope of this paper to answer this question. These are, however, important questions for more extensive study.

What happened to my grandmother after this calamity befell her and her family? What happened to her children in Majd al-Kroum and how did she survive after the death of her husband and the demolition of her home? Zahra al-Ja’uniyya was left to begin almost from scratch after the personal catastrophe that befell her in November 1948. My grandmother’s only consolation was that most of her children were married, save Ahmad, her youngest son from Abu Ma’yuf, whose wedding day I remember. My grandmother then lived next to him in a little room she erected on the lands of al-Shaykha near her demolished home. My grandmother encouraged all of her children to stay in the village and not to flee, despite the dangers they themselves had witnessed on 6 November, 1948. My uncle Ali became a refugee after the Nakba, however, in the ‘Ein al-Hilwe refugee camp where he lived the rest of his life.³⁵ As for my father, he was expelled from the village on 9 January, 1949 and he, his wife and child became refugees in Lebanon for over two years, only returning in July 1951. Thus my family was able to live once again in our village and close to my grandmother (this is another interesting autobiographical story written and recently published).³⁶

After the war in Palestine was over and the dust had settled, it was clear that my grandmother had endured her fair share of misery, enough for ten men to bear. She was first widowed in Ja’uni. Then Abu Fayyad, her second husband, died, followed by war and the execution of her third and last husband. At age 50, her home was demolished and her family in Ja’uni had been lost to her, now refugees in Syria. Then, a number of villagers, including some of her children and their families, were expelled at the start of 1949. Thus, in the wake of the Nakba, my grandmother had to start a new phase of her life as a citizen of the Jewish state.

I was introduced to my grandmother Zahra after we returned from Lebanon in the summer of 1951. My maternal grandmother Maryam had passed away a few weeks

before our return to Majd al-Kroum.³⁷ My personal memories of my grandmother Zahra in the '50s are intermittent, linked to our visits on holidays and special occasions. I most remember her little home near the home of Uncle Ahmad, Abu Ma'yuf's youngest son. My grandmother worked as a washerwoman for Jewish families in Haifa with her divorced daughter Sa'da, before the latter remarried in the late 1950s. Some advised her to quit this work because of her advanced years. My grandmother told these "advisors"—some of whom were her children—that she would rather she and her daughter put food on the table through their own toil and sweat than to have to ask anything of anyone. It seems her children were embarrassed by their mother's work but they did not have much of an alternative. Jobs were scarce in those days during the years of military rule and each had a family and children to provide for.³⁸ I, however, was on my grandmother's side. At least every time I visited her, especially on holidays, she was ready with holiday money, which always makes children happy.

Epilogue

Zahra al-Ja'uniyya died on 6 March, 1968. This date is on her gravestone and was registered in Abu Jamil's record book. In the days that followed the Naksa of June 1967, I was busy with work and saving some money before my university classes began. During my master's studies in Jerusalem, I met a university student who would become my wife and the mother of my children. For the first time, I travelled to meet Aziza's family—first to Safad and then to 'Akbara, which was an extremely modest village to the south of the Safad government hospital. These regions were not familiar to me despite their close proximity to Ja'uni, which I had not yet visited.

This trip turned out to be an adventure I will never forget. I was successful in asking and receiving Aziza's hand in marriage. But it also opened up a new window for me in understanding the course of events in the Safad region. I found out that Abu Hussein, my wife's father, knew Mano Friedman from Rosh Pina. My wife's family was originally from Qaditha, not far from Ja'uni. So ultimately I heard from my father-in-law that he also once had a business relationship with Mano Friedman during the British Mandate period, and even after the establishment of Israel. Unlike the sad and painful stories about the Nakba from Majd al-Kroum, Abu Hussein's accounts of the 1948 events were told without great sentiment.

My father-in-law related the story of their displacement from their village Qaditha at the end of 1948 and their arrival in Ja'uni, where they lived for several months. Then the extended family was transferred to 'Akbara, a village south of Safad, whose inhabitants had been displaced earlier.³⁹ Years later, while reading Abu Jamil's record book closely, I found a passage mentioning "the Huleihel family formerly from

Qaditha, who returned from Lebanon by Mano Friedman, [first] to Ja'uni before settling in 'Akbara."

When I went back to check the accuracy of what Abu Jamil had written, it proved very accurate. Mano Friedman had sent for the people of Qaditha, his friends including Abu Hussein in particular, and had brought them back to the country, settling them first in Ja'uni. After a few months, the family was moved to 'Akbara, where my wife was born and where I met her parents for the first time many years later. Hence, I found myself returning to the starting point of my grandmother's story. The circle opened by my grandfather Abu Fayyad nearly a century ago had closed.

The Safad area, Ja'uni in particular, has changed dramatically since 1948. Only a small percentage of Safad-area villages and their inhabitants remained after the war.⁴⁰ This fact in particular ignited some of my relatives' enthusiasm and an onslaught of memories when I chose a wife from that area. My aunt Sa'da, who stayed with my grandmother for many years, expressed her joy saying, "I love the smell of that area and its people, who remind me of our people in Ja'uni."

Finally, to the day of her death, my wife's mother's face and eyes reminded us of my grandmother Zahra. Um Hussein was the only child of parents from the village of Sufsaf, which was not far from Qaditha, Safad and Ja'uni. She told me how she named her youngest daughter Aziza after a beloved cousin. That cousin "was killed by the Jews in 1948" with dozens of others from Sufsaf, after the village was occupied in operation Hiram on October 29, 1948.⁴¹ As she talked about the circumstances surrounding that massacre, Um Hussein's eyes would fill up with tears and I had to stop dredging up those bitter memories, especially since her entire family had become refugees in Lebanon. Um Hussein's story is like my grandmother's—it deserves to be written and studied because it reveals an undocumented Palestinian history. Were historians and researchers to find the time to take interest in the stories of our grandmothers and grandfathers, it would add an important aspect—the lives of ordinary people—to Palestinian history. If oral history accounts are reviewed well and integrated into academic research and documentation, a different social history, one rarely found in Arab libraries today, could be presented and cherished.

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Endnotes

¹ Not much has been written about the history of marriages in Palestine's rural areas during the Ottoman era because marriage contracts were made in the village without being registered in *shar'iyya* court registrars, which constitute a major source of information for this and many other social matters. From my personal study of Jerusalem through reading *shar'iyya* court documents, I have been able to confirm the marriage dates of many scholars and figures in Jerusalem, which appear in my book, *A'lam Filastin or The Notables of Palestine at the End of the Ottoman Period (1800-1918)* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1994). These registries are also the basis for my latest study, *Jerusalem at the Early 19th Century (1798-1831)* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies) (forthcoming).

² The circumstances surrounding the death of my grandmother's first husband remain mysterious. I learned from my aunt Sa'da that he was elderly and died in the war's early stages, when epidemics and disease spread, taking the lives of many.

³ Rosh Pina is northeast of Safad and was one of the first Zionist settlements. It was established in 1878 by Jews from Safad, and renewed later in 1882 after the failure of the first attempt. The settlement was established on land bought by wealthy Jews from Safad, which were part of the Ja'uni lands. The residents of Ja'uni and the Jews of Rosh Pina coexisted with relatively peaceful relations until 1948.

⁴ The precise date of my grandfather Hajj Salim Krayim's death is unknown but is linked in family narratives to the birth of his last son, Hussein, my father, in 1924. The oral narrative indicates that Hajj Salim died a year or two after his last son was born.

⁵ I have heard the story of what happened to Abu Ma'yuf and his home throughout my childhood. I later checked this story, in particular its purported date, in my subsequent study of Israeli army documents and in an interview with Mohammed Haydar "Abu Jamil", during which I discovered

that he had kept an important written record. However, there were no details in that record about the massacre that took place in Majd al-Kroum that day. Apparently, the residents feared retaliations from Israeli authorities in those days of military rule. Orally, however, the villagers recall that on that day in November 1948, eight or nine people were murdered in Majd al-Kroum and several others injured. More details appear later in this account.

⁶ My aunt Sa'da had a good memory and a very spirited personality, which helped me to obtain many accurate details and socially sensitive information. I returned to her in the final years to try and reconfirm my information or to get answers to my questions. Most importantly, unlike other storytellers, my aunt at times said that she did not know or did not remember, instead of offering guesses or inaccurate statements.

⁷ In addition to providing important and accurate information about individuals, families and organizations in the village (the spring, the mosque, and the school) there is information on general events and their ramifications on the village that comprise the raw material for writing the history of the village from the early years of the British Mandate and after the Nakba. For example, I found in this record book documentation of events I remember from my childhood, as well as the names of teachers at my school during the mid-50s.

⁸ The inhabitants of Palestine and the neighbouring Arab countries suffered from compulsory recruitment into military service (the *seferberlik*) and forced hard labour. Emergency laws were imposed, supplies and sheep were confiscated and trees cut down for war purposes. Trade was obstructed and food stuffs were scarce. Then came locusts and epidemics and famine that spread among the people. For more: L. Schatkowski Schilcher, "The famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria" In J.P. Spagnolo (ed.) *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992) 229-25.

⁹ I heard this story about the circumstances of

my grandfather's second marriage many times from my early childhood, both from my father, and my aunts.

¹⁰ The villagers relayed a number of stories about the generosity of Abu Fayyad, saying that his name (which means "outpouring") was appropriate because he was also "the father of the poor". These qualities appeared to be well-known to my grandmother's family.

¹¹ The child mortality rate was very high at the end of Ottoman rule and during the British Mandate period. Abu Fayyad had married twice before my grandmother. Jalilah bore him three children—Fayyad lived, while two girls died in childhood. His second wife did not have any children and, according to the oral stories, died at an early age four or five years before Abu Fayyad married Zahra.

¹² Abu Jamil began recording deaths in the village only from the end of the 1920s, so I was not able to learn the exact date of my grandfather's death. His first wife, Jalilah, died (according to the record book) on 30 November, 1931. Abu Jamil wrote, "The death of Jalilah, the wife of the late Salim Hajj Krayyim."

¹³ The remnants of this patriarchal culture are alive in many rural areas in Palestine and in other Arab countries.

¹⁴ Refer, for example, to Shukri Arraf's book, *The Palestinian Arab Village* (Third edition, Maaliyah, 1996).

¹⁵ Abu Jamil documented this event in his record book accurately and briefly on page 4, number 82, writing, "Hussein Khalil Qaddah was caught in Salim Hajj's house by the camp police Abed Othman and Yousef al-Rayyes al-Ghazzawi on 13/9/1929".

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5, number 94. The sentence was issued against Hussein Khalil after a suit filed by al-Ja'uniyya on 14 November, 1929—that is, two months after his arrest.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 7, number 153. Ahmad al-Amin, in collaboration with Tawfiq Jabir, Mohammad Bisher and others, were charged with the murder. The defendants were acquitted, however, and it soon

became clear that others were responsible for Khalil's murder.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Abu Jamil casually recorded the names of those who were later alleged as the killers of Khalil Qaddah in the margins next to the record of his murder and burial. Those rumored to have participated in the killing included Ahmad Fayyad, the son of Fayyad, born to Salim Hajj Krayyim. In any case factionalism in Palestinian society is an important subject that Arab scholars rarely venture into, and which exceeds the boundaries of this modest paper. For more on this see. 'Isa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948* (Albany: Sunny, 1991). In my own childhood, I remember some fights (*toshe*, plural *tuwash*) that broke out involving my relatives during the 1950s and '60s and even several years after. Israeli military authorities exploited these minor feuds as part of their 'divide and conquer' policy, putting heads of households in competition with each other over their relationships with police and Israeli institutions.

¹⁹ Shaykh Nabhan was a Sufi shaykh who people believed had the ability to cure the sick and do other miracles. Abu Jamil was his accountant or book keeper at the time. His son, Shaykh Mahmoud Nabhan, inherited his status after his death. I have some recollection of arguing with my mother about Shaykh Mahmoud's inherited abilities to cure the sick and help the needy.

²⁰ The elderly recount stories that confirm the construction during the days of Dhahir al-'Umar al-Zaydani of the village mosque and a number of homes around it, including the house I was raised in. I later found evidence of the good relations between Dhahir al-'Umar and his children and the people of Majd al-Kroum. When Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar ('the butcher'), the ruler of Acre for about three decades (1775-1804), pursued the Ziyadina in the Galilee villages, the people of Majd al-Kroum took the side of 'Ali, the son of Dhahir. Al-Jazzar took revenge and killed many of them, sending their decapitated heads to Istanbul as proof of his victory in the battle on

the Majd al-Kroum plains. For further information, see my book, *The History of Palestine at the End of the Ottoman Era 1700-1918*. (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1999) 80-81.

²¹ Majd al-Kroum falls to the west of the Shaghour Plain where springs run from the adjacent mountains onto its lands, moving west before settling in the Qarar Valley, mentioned in Abu Jamil's record book.

²² In my short biography of Abdel Fattah al-Sa'di (published in my book, *Notables of Palestine* (See endnote 1, p. 201), I did not give the correct date of his death. Abu Jamil since provided me with this information, which I have not found in any other historical source.

²³ Abu Jamil's records show that he used to read the newspapers and report some of the important news from them during the revolution and the years preceding it. For example, he mentioned "the expulsion of the Arabs of Hawareth on 15 June, 1930", indicating the lands of the Hawareth Valley that were bought by the Jews from the Tayyan family in Jaffa. The Arabs of that region refused to leave for a long time until a court order was issued for their expulsion. There are also many other notes in Abu Jamil's records about public events, especially the days of the 1936 rebellion, which will not be discussed here in order to stay focused on my grandmother's story.

²⁴ My father would often tell stories of his experiences as a small 'orphan' during that period and later in the 1930s when he began working as a teenager in the Nur match factory in Acre.

²⁵ "Exchange" marriages ('*badal*' in Arabic) were common in Palestinian villages and in neighboring Arab countries. The marriage was usually based on a deal where the grooms each married the other's sister without having to pay the usual dowry.

²⁶ I understand from oral and written accounts that Emmanuel (Mano) Friedman was a unique and complex character. He established numerous relationships with the people of the Galilee villages, in addition to his neighbours in Ja'uni, some of which

will be discussed later. In general, relations between the Arab residents of Ja'uni and the Jewish settlers who established Rosh Pina in 1883 were good. The majority of these Jews were new immigrants who came to Palestine from Romania and who had the support of the well-known Jewish philanthropist, Baron Rothschild.

²⁷ On the same date, Abu Jamil also recorded the marriage of Mohammed Ali Sa'id Qaddah, who remained a friend of my father's for a long time, in addition to the wedding of Salim Fayyad, the grandson of Salim Haj Krayyim. Abu Jamil also added that the wedding celebrants "were invited to the store of Jamil Mohammed Haydar [the recorder's eldest son] and he made lunch for everyone." When I mentioned to my mother three years ago that her wedding day was only one of several that day, and that they were invited to Jamil Mohammed Haydar's home, she was surprised that I had this information. She also gave me more information about the wedding that we had not discussed before.

²⁸ Samih was not buried in the village cemetery but rather next to his mother's little home in an area called 'al-Shaykha'. I saw this lonely grave near my grandmother's shack, which she built sometime in the aftermath of the demolition of Abu Maayuf's house in 1948.

²⁹ The Salvation Army (*Jaysh al-Inqadh*) were army units of Arab volunteers from neighboring Arab states who came to support the Palestinian military effort in early 1948. These units led by Fawzi al-Jawuqi continued to fight alongside the Palestinians, particularly in the Galilee, long after the official involvement of Arab armies ended.

³⁰ Haim Orbach, who worked at a British army camp during WWII, had good relations with Palestinian workers in the same camp including some from Majd al-Kroum, according to Abu Sa'id, who remained proud of his friendship with Orbach until the end of his life. Abu Sa'id was surprised when I told him that Orbach worked in the intelligence unit of the Hagana and that his friendship with Arabs was mostly a way of obtaining information about their

villages. Still, Abu Sa'id did not change his positive position towards his friend Orbach and continued to boast that he played a key role in reaching the handover agreement; he also said Orbach played an important role in stopping the massacre near the village spring on 6 November, 1948.

³¹ For more information about the events of the Nakba in Majd al-Kroum, read my article "Memory and the History of the Nakba: The Model of Majd al-Kroum" in the book, *Towards Contextualizing a Historical Narrative of al-Nakba: Problems and Challenges*, edited by Mustafa Kabaha (Haifa: Mada al-Karmel, 2006) 173-207.

³² The details of this massacre and what happened that day in Majd al-Kroum are mentioned in my article, "Memory and the History of Events of al-Nakba" (see endnote no. 30).

³³ My aunt Sa'da confirmed the details of Mano Friedman's visit to my grandmother and the dialogue between them, which she witnessed.

³⁴ Since the late 1980s and the publication of the New Historian accounts, gaps between the Palestinian and some Israeli accounts have been narrowed. See Ilan Pappé's *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2006).

³⁵ My uncle Ali recently passed away in the 'Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp near Sayda in south Lebanon on 1 July, 2006. His children and grandchildren still live in the camp and in the city of Sayda to this day.

³⁶ See "Memory and the History..."

³⁷ Once again, Abu Jamil's record book came to my aid in confirming the oral story. He wrote of the death of "Maryam Amin Ahmad Sa'id, who was hit by a car in the village and buried on 25 June, 1951." Our return from Lebanon was by sea to the north of Acre after my maternal grandmother Maryam passed away and before the birth of my brother Mohammad, with whom my mother was pregnant, according to my parents.

³⁸ My mother, for example, had given birth to seven sons by 1960. The Israeli government had confiscated half of our property, the share of my uncle 'Ali who became a refugee in Lebanon and did not return. The rest of our land, inherited from my grandfather Salim al-Hajj, was not enough to support a decent livelihood.

³⁹ Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1992), 485 - 486. This important resource, which relies largely on Benny Morris and his studies, only includes a small part of the story of Qaditha and its people as I heard it later.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 427-510. For more on this subject, also see Mustafa 'Abbasi, *Safad-area Villages During the British Mandate* (Copyright belongs to author, 1996).

⁴¹ Khalidi, pp. 490-491.