

In 1947 my parents boarded in Genoa a Palestine-bound boat which the British intercepted near the east Mediterranean shore. The passengers - mostly frail holocaust survivors like them - were interned in yet another prison - this time, Cyprus. In these barracks my mother met for the first time jews of Moroccan extraction. Her stories of them dancing to a drum beat around the bonfire at night always struck me as instant myth-making; it was strange to hear them from an intelligent, level-headed person, persecuted for her religion, who managed to outwit her detractors and survive against all odds. Why was she, indeed, threatened by the encounter? The reason, I believe is simple enough to understand even though it reflects one of the greatest barriers between the spirits of the present and the past: At the time, one of the few beliefs shared by leftists and rightists, imperialists and communists, secular and religious was that progress was both inevitable and good whereas backwardness, a disease that must be cured by any means necessary. Neither the eight languages my mother spoke nor the vast experience she acquired during the war, provided any help when people designated 'primitive' were concerned.

When my mother became pregnant she was given a special permission to leave the camp and my brother was delivered in a hospital in Haifa. Several months later, the British gave up their mandate, the UN voted to partition Palestine, the War of Independence ensued. My parents settled in Jerusalem in 48, worked hard, saved as much as they could. By the time I was born, they bought an apartment in Rehavia and my father was promoted to an executive position. Ten years after arriving to Jerusalem as refugees, collecting two coarse blankets from the Zionist Agency, my family entered the ranks of the comfortable middle classes. The transition might have left some traces on my brother; he identified with my father strongly and fancied himself a self-made man. In my own mind, his self-image was preposterous; he had not to worry about food, medicine or shelter even for a single day in his short, tragic life.

*Shortly before I was born, my parents bought a first floor flat of a solid apartment building in Rehavia which had a separate entrance and a parcel of private land around it and, excavating under the foundations, converted it to a fairly large apartment with a garden by. The darkest part of our home was divided into a workshop we named for some reason 'the Laboratory' and a large storage room referred to as 'the Depo' that provided my sister and me endless hours of adventure and discovery. Our old furniture was kept next to school notebooks in stacked fruit boxes; my father stored his old suits, my mother, her evening dresses and my brother, the giant orange volumes which collected and bounded past issues of Haaretz Shelanu - the youth magazine of a daily newspaper to which my parents subscribed. As we grew up, our children's books were added to the lot and, during my brother's military service, so was a locked metal trunk with explosives, live ammunition and other items squirreled from the army, which frightened my mother rightly and to no end. In a relatively short time, we managed to recreate the musty, history-laden atmosphere of a central-European attic in our bauhaus-inspired neighborhood in the middle-east.*

*In one of these historical expeditions I discovered in a box containing personal affects a case with rigid shell, clasped as a clam, covering an inner hull, lined with white silk, wherein the gold-rimmed reading glasses of my late uncle were folded. My eyes widened at the discovery of these 'John Lennon glasses', which I immediately re-fitted with the darkest lenses the neighborhood optometrist could find. It is difficult to convey how providential it all seemed - my uncle reaching out to me from his grave to help my fledging style! The year, lest you forget, was 1969; a revolution that was taking place - the bell-bottom revolution, of course - which was evident but difficult for me and my friends to heed. Only in one store in the entire city teen-agers were offered the craved look they saw on the album- and magazine- covers. If you wanted to move with the times, you had to search deep, do-it-yourself and improvise.*

In the 1970's, Jerusalem was probably as good a place as any for a bookish bur rebellious youth like me. There was a good university with an extensive library which I had a permission to use, even better concerts - mostly Zubin Mehta directing the philharmonic orchestra - where my mother's resistant husband was dragged once a month and a museum which had cutting edge exhibitions of contemporary art at the time and excellent art classes for youth. The Jerusalem Theater had decent plays and housed one of the tea-houses that dominated the social life of the city - where the young and a la mode sat on rope-upholstered stools, discussing at leisure Bergman movies in candle light. Scores of foreign visitors provided international flare and the type of information I craved for: A French woman who hired me as a baby sitter told me about going to a training camps for Maoist students outside Paris; a distant relative turned who out to be a Yippie divulged a secret plan of the organization to spike the water reservoir of New York City with LSD. A bohemian philosophy professor introduced me to minimal and conceptual art.

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