Looking for 33°8'28"N 35°47'30"E and Finding Farouk's Home.
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On August 30, 2015 we located Farouk Merzamkwho's house in Mansura. Mansura is a destroyed village in occupied Golan, located some 10 km south of Majdal Shams. It is one of the 200 communities destroyed by Israel after conquering the Golan in the 1967 war. Mansura is one of the 12 Circassian villages that was occupied and then destroyed.

It was a perfect day with beautiful weather and light, and even with some drops of rain, which is not typical for summer in our region. The identification of the specific place and rubbles of that home is obviously an emotional experience for us, Eléonore (his daughter) and Eitan (her husband), exactly on our first year marriage anniversary. Yet, we believe that reconstructing the whole process we 1went through to localise this house could serve as a methodology for many in the world who are actively engaged with memory projects, (counter-)mapping and other reclamation initiatives.

It's difficult to identify one specific starting point for this search and journey, but clearly Eléonore's PhD research has served as a solid foundation[1]. Four years ago, in 2011, we located the village together. The many talks with Farouk were also crucial to create the context in which we could operate.

In the beginning of August 2015, while we visited Eléonore's parents in their home in France, we had the opportunity to work with Farouk for several days. We interviewed him about his village and his childhood in Mansura and about his later years living in Quneitra. He told us many things, some of which we knew already, and shared some new information with Eitan that he never told to Eléonore. Farouk drew a schema of his house on paper. By using Google Earth he located the estimated spot on the ground where his house used to be. But it remains difficult to ensure the accuracy of such localizations.


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[1] Merza, E. 2012, *Ni Juifs ni Arabes en Israël. Dialectiques d'identification et négociations identitaires d'une minorité dans un espace en guerre. Le cas des Tcherkesses (Adyghéens) de Kfar Kama et de Reyhaniya*. (in French. « Neither Jews nor Arabs in Israel. Dialectics of identification and identitary negocations of a minority in a space at war. The case of the Circassians (Adygheans) of Kfar Kama and Reyhaniya »). PhD thesis in Social Anthropology and Ethnology. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, France, 862 pages.

Farouk printed a photo of Google Earth showing the area of Mansura: he marked his childhood house on it as well as Amin Samko's house (a neighbour), the house of the Mukhtar Hamid Yanam, the elementary school, and a piece of land where between 36 and 40 Druze have been buried in 1894. A bloody clash between the Circassians and the Druze in the Golan took place and as a sanction the Circassians didn't return the dead bodies of the Druze they killed. As mentioned, it's difficult to know the exact accuracy of these localizations: maybe what's more important at this stage is to have brought Farouk to dig into his memory.

Perhaps the first "scientific" point of the search for the house was purchasing the aerial photo of Mansura from the Israel Mapping Centre. We were able to do this thanks to information we received from Taiseer Maray, Director of the Majdal Shams NGO Golan for the Development of the Arab Villages, with whom we have been discussing this project for a long time. This high-quality cliché was taken by Israeli Air Force on February 14, 1969, less then two years after the village was occupied by Israel. What's significant in this image is that the village is totally empty of people since 1967, but all the houses are still standing in 1969. Another aerial photo taken in 1971, shows that the houses had been completely demolished. From reading Aharon Shai's article on the Israeli State-sponsored destruction project in the 1960's, we assume that Mansura was probably destroyed at the end of 1969[2].

We showed the 1969 aerial image to Farouk: it was the first time he could see his house in a photo. He easily identified his home, as well as the other sites mentioned above. The challenging (and somewhat funny) part of the research was for him to show Eléonore the identified sites of the photo by Skype since her parents are not so used to work with new technologies.


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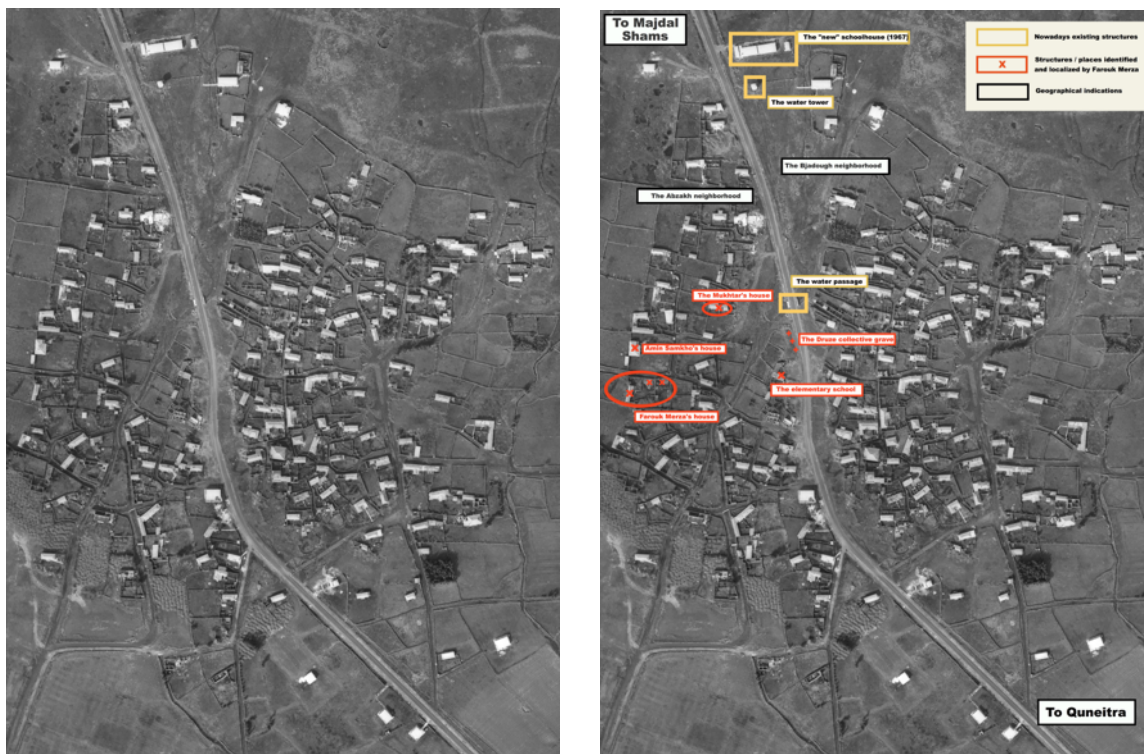
[2] Shai, A, 2002.« Goral HaKfarim Ha'Arviyim HaNetushim BeMedinat Israel Erev Milhemet Sheshet HaYamim VeAharea » (in Hebrew, « The Fate of Abandoned Arab Villages before and after the Six Days War. », pers. translation) *Katedra* 105: 151-170.

With the high-resolution photo of the village from 1969 (complete with the identified sites marked on it) we returned to Google Earth. Since the "new" school-house (built in 1965) and Mansura's water tower are still standing, they served as key reference points in the two images. We identified some other spots that appeared in both of them: a water passage under the main road; the road number 98 and its curves that didn't change; two *wadi* tracks, which cross the village. As we could measure the distances on the screen between the different sites on the photo and compare them to the image in Google Earth, it was easy to post a pin on the exact place of every site we had to identify. In that way we used Google Earth to create a map of the exact sites in Mansura and each one of them got a precise waypoint (North/East). Farouk's house was 33°8'28"N 35°47'30"E.

With this newly completed document and the compass app on our mobile phones, which can provide a waypoint on the ground, we thought it would be possible to find the specific location of Farouk's house. We thought the village might be in a minefield, as there are so many in the Golan and many around Mansura itself. While we felt it was possible, Eitan wasn't absolutely sure that we could access it physically; Eléonore had a very strong intuition that we would. In a way, the process seemed "too simple" and we wondered why we've never tried it before with destroyed Palestinian villages. A day before traveling to the Golan we published a short video on Facebook in which Eléonore said that even if we wouldn't find the house, what we were going to do was already important and fascinating both for many others and us.

We arrived in Mansura on Sunday, August 30th in the morning and were glad to find out that the nearest minefield ends at the border of the village. It is fenced all around for the cattle grazing in the village. We entered and walked south in the direction of the water passage under the road, which was easy to find since the building style is clearly Circassian, with typical black stones.
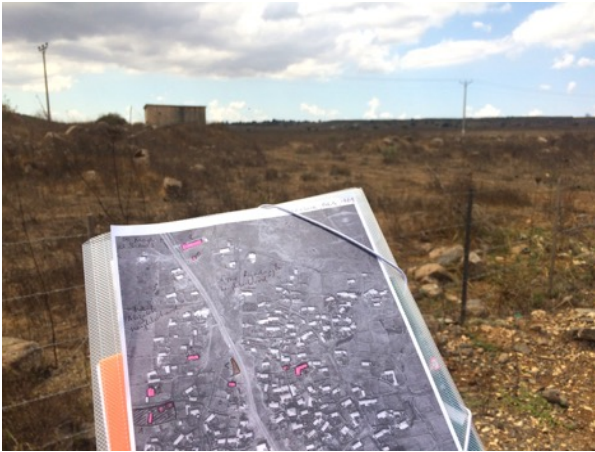
A little further south, close to the road, we found the first localized site: the original elementary school. It was all rubble of course, but we were happy to see that our method was workable. The rubble on the ground was at the exact same waypoint we marked on the Google Earth printout, based on the 1969 aerial photo.

From there, we turned east and after walking some 200 meters we found the stop where Farouk's house used to be. We pinpointed it with an accuracy of one second east-west and one north-south (within a proximity of 30 meters, since each second is equal to 30 meters on the ground). We were extremely excited of course: it was a moment filled with strong emotion and also pride in our methodology as we were able to acknowledge the efficiency of our tools and processes that could be used to find destroyed places.

On the next day when we checked our findings again, we found to our embarrassment that we had made a mistake: the waypoint we identified on the ground was in fact 33°8'23"N 35°47'33"E and not 33°8'28"N 35°47'30"E, as it should have been for Farouk's house. It means we were some 150 meters south and 60 meters east to his house. In retrospect, it seems that we were too overcome by emotion and so we didn't take the time to double-check our results on the ground.

Without hesitation (and foregoing breakfast) we drove back to Mansura, determined to identify the actual spot of Farouk's house. It took nearly two hours under more challenging conditions: for one thing, the weather was much hotter than the day before and, for another, we were subject to the constant loud explosions of the war in Syria, just a few kilometers away. This time we worked with the two mobile phones. We were surprised to find out that each one identified different waypoints depending on the moment even as we stood standing in the exact same spot. This taught us that while our tools may not be accurate to the centimeter, they are good enough to confirm that the rubble we found belongs to Farouk's house.

This time, we didn't just double-check, we quadruple-checked. Once it was obvious that we were on the exact spot, we sent Farouk pictures of us standing on the rubble and a short 360-degree video of the location.
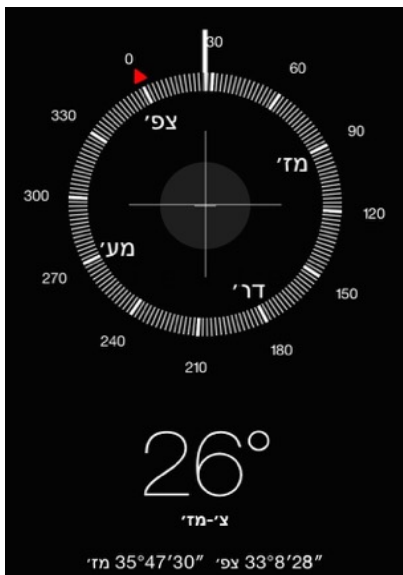
As soon as he received the video, Farouk called us immediately on Viber: it was amazing that we could share our joy and excitement in real time with him and Chantal (Eléonore's mother). He is quite an imperturbable man. He had the decency of those who had been through exile, far away from home, of those who had to rebuild everything from scratch all over again. We could feel, maybe for the first time, how meaningful this journey to his home was for him too.