

## Wailing Map | Adi Sorek | English: Ami Asher

I'm writing this on *Tisha B'Av*. Although this is not deliberate, I still feel it is not a coincidence. Indeed, this passage is intimately related to that saddest of days in the Jewish calendar, a time of lamenting on the destruction of both temples, a day of mourning, of weeping and wailing, a date dedicated to the contemplation of pettiness both human and divine. It is a day, moreover, which does not necessarily involve judgment or forgiveness, but rather recognition - recognition of sorrow; acknowledgement of a wrong too great to fathom.

Sitting on *Tisha B'Av* and writing about Eitan's map which details the destruction of this disputed land, I'm thinking about mourning and weeping and wailing. And I'm thinking of Daoud, of whom I'll shortly tell you, and wonder whether we would ever be able to shed tears together, as a community of sorrow, over maps and their absence - over the village ruins and the "landscape" and also over the "internal landscape" - which have acquired the outlines of partial maps. Internal maps.

But before I talk about Daoud and me, I would like to share with you a crying tale recently told by the poet Erez Biton. This is one of his only visual memories from the time before he lost his sight. In this memory, two women in Lod/Lydda are standing at the entrance to a house: from inside, Biton's mother, and from outside, another woman, also speaking Arabic. And both are crying and crying. Crying, crying, crying, as Biton tells it in his cracked voice. One has recently arrived from Algeria on a rocking boat, to a house which is not hers; while the other has recently left her home and all its contents and fled for life. When the woman standing outside the house arrived, Biton's mother naturally told her that she could take back the house - of course, after all, it's hers. She didn't hesitate for a second, added Biton. But the woman knew she could not. That she can no longer. And therefore only cried and cried. Perhaps she took a thing or two, a vase or keepsake. And then they both stood at the entrance and wailed together in Arabic, together they cried and cried.

I'm sitting on *Tisha B'Av* and thinking about maps and names and numbers and red and blue dots. And I'm wondering how to connect them to internal maps: to veins, to blocked arteries, to muscles cramped in fear around the diaphragm. To the miniscule capillaries sometimes seen through our skin, to songs written, to memories and anxieties inherited from others, to the coarseness most of us are cursed with as a kind of disability we are told is essential for survival.

How do we connect all those tiny reddish or bluish lines, all those streams and footpaths, all those roads and arteries and highways, hills and mountains? It seems this question is already far removed from the realm of justice or information. I wonder how to enable the spirit to contain difficult details without fearing its own would be looted: so and so many houses demolished, houses used to house invaders, villages emptied and then destroyed, people who fled or were expelled, killed, repeatedly displaced, refugees and deportees who come here out of all

places and others who are forced out for the same obscure reasons, whose home is now ruins attesting to movements of uprooting and displacement that took place while others planted and harvested and ate the fruit of the land, new vines were cultured and new wines tasted and songs were written and a scorching and parching coarseness, thought to be absolutely necessary, was taught and rehearsed. I wonder how to let the stories interweave, how to retrace our steps and talk about this from a common perspective.

This takes me back to *Tisha B'Av* and to the mourning and weeping and wailing again - to Erez Biton's mother and her joint lament. Maybe we need to cry. Maybe we should wet the maps, soften the paper and let the words liquefy. "Streamlets have shed tears as mighty as rivers", reads one of that day's laments, "for we have been given no rainbow as token".<sup>1</sup>

As you may recall, I promised to tell you about Daoud and me, and about wondering whether shedding common tears on maps and their absence could do some good. I'm not sure I'd be able to really tie everything together, but I will tell you what I can about Daoud and me and our meeting and the dream I had about it. I met Daoud long ago, more than a decade, when researching Kafr Qasim.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the film we planned to make about the village and the destruction there was not produced, but some of the things the local interviewees had told me survive in the form of thought provoking written words. .

On one of the days we did the research I sat in Daoud's office and he told me how he became a lawyer. By the way, he told me - and I don't remember anymore how we got to that particular subject - that at the time geography was not taught as part of the curriculum of Arab schools in Israel. He then went on to tell me other things, some related to his professional career and others to the question of memory in Kafr Qasim. But it was that casual reference to geography studies which preoccupied me and remained etched in my mind. Perhaps this is what happens when the story is too difficult to really be told, like the village's story: what sometimes happens is that precisely the minutest and most insignificant details occupy one's mind, remaining just as irksome and dumfounding as tiny capillaries on an undrawn map.

When driving in my car after the interview, I imagined a life without geography. A life in a delimited plane enwrapped in darkness, a flat life with no mountain or valley, no river or sea. A life in a delimited plane driving to and from which does not connect the dots, does not connect here and there. Like a sentence that cannot be written. Several nights later, I dreamt about the maps I was taught to

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<sup>1</sup> From an anonymous *Tisha B'Av* lament that opens with the words: "Shall Zion grieve forever and Jerusalem lament".

<sup>2</sup> On October 29, 1956 the Israel Border Police (*Magav*) massacred 48 Palestinian citizens returning to the village from farm work during a curfew imposed earlier in the day, on the eve of Suez-Sinai war, of which they were unaware as it had been declared in their absence.

read during my military service, when training to navigate in the area around the former village of Ju'ara (southeast of Haifa). We lived in a military ghost town made of beautiful stone houses, and committed to memory path descriptions that included such details as arriving from a "Sheik's grave" to "cactus bushes", and from them to an "old ruin" and a "well". At nights, we used to march from one such landmark to the other as somnambulists trapped between hollow words. Something was unhallowed within us; empty geography.

In my dream, Daoud and I are together. We are no longer in his law office, but standing in a valley surrounded by rolling hills, just like those that may be found in the so-called Valley of Peace, not far from Ju'ara, and the land was covered by a map stretched from one horizon to the other, through which some plants sprouted and even some trees grew and there were also cattle gates and fences that marked the grazing areas, some of them electrified. And when we moved, Daoud and me, the map made a sound like wrinkling paper, but wasn't torn. And we followed the dull brownish-green colors that separated mountain from valley, circle by circle and ridge by ridge, and traced the difference between the river's light blue and the shades of its banks. Daoud told me that he never had a chance to see all that. And I thought it was weird that the map was making noise but not getting torn. And then everything began to blur. Perhaps everything became fuzzy because of the sadness that now enwrapped us.

So we stood on the map, with our backs to Camp Ju'ara and our faces towards the Valley of Peace, with electric cattle fences in the middle. For a moment, we laid our heads on each other's shoulder. And the river drawn on the map spread under our feet, that map that stretched from one horizon to the other, and it began shedding blue water. And minute by minute the map became stained, the map became wet, and minute by minute it wept: "And for these causes I wail and my heart roars and moans, and I call upon the weepers and wisewomen".<sup>3</sup> First our toes got wet, Daoud's and mine, and then the water grew higher and higher, and streamlets shed mighty tears.

This was the dream I had because of that little anecdote Daoud had shared with me. For years now, I've been walking in this country and reading double maps. Double and triple, external and internal maps. In this country, where erasures are so common, as are the forgetting of languages and the forgetting of traditions.

I'm sitting on *Tisha B'Av* and completing this text and looking at Eitan's map. It has two colors and everything that is, is colored with grey and relegated to the background, while everything that is no longer is punctuated in red.

From the edge of the map I call Erez Biton with his cracked voice (cracked as though his blindness has somehow affected his voice) to retell that primal scene

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<sup>3</sup> A lament by Rabbi Kalunymus Ben Judah that begins with the words: "Oh that my head were filled with water".

where two women cried in Arabic on the threshold of a house. It seems to me that from there, from among the tears and wails, from among the grey dots and the red dots and the capillary paths, the blocked arteries, the bluish veins and rivers, out of that waxing and wailing recognition, some hope may perhaps flow.

That from such a place things may be understood as worthy of wailing. And that from here, the talk of a community of sorrow may wonder and wish and protest and weepeth sore in the night: How, how? *Eicha, eicha?*

*Read in the launching of Eitan Bronstein's and Zochrot's Nakba Map, Tel Aviv, Tisha B'Av 5775*