

I  
*had thought  
of writing a  
play based on  
the following  
facts:*

1 I now live in Nahlaot.

2 From the end of our street I can see Gan Sacker and the stone wall enclosing the graveyard where my grandmother is buried.

3 Gan Sacker used to be wheat fields farmed by the villagers of Sheikh Badr.

4 The caretaker, Ezra Cohen from Istanbul, lives in a tin shack near the entrance to the graveyard. On Friday night you can see

the flame of two candles through the cracks.

5 My mother was on her way from Jerusalem to Rome when her mother died.

6 The villagers of Sheikh Badr used to pray at the mosque that's now on Strauss, behind the Edison Theatre.

7 The Edison Theatre was built in 1932 by MY Mizrahi and Sons.

8 I have a great-aunt who lives in Istanbul but now she spends half the year in Athens with her daughter's family since being evicted by a developer. We've never met.

9 A relative on my mother's side, Shlomo Almuli, published a book called "The Interpretation of Dreams" in Constantinople in 1530 which was first quoted by Freud in 1899.

10 Another great-aunt, whom I know well, was a patient of Freud's for a brief period after being sent from Belgrade to study in Vienna.

11 Sheikh Badr, who had a feud with Sheikh Jarrah and was sanctified for his power of answering prayers for rain, is buried under the Hilton, to the right of the graveyard.

12 Legends about Sheikh Badr: some put him in the 7th century, others in the 11th or the 18th. He may have been the founder of a revered circle of dervishes or he may have been born in the Hijaz, the grandson of Caliph Ibn Abu Talib. When the spoils were divided, Sheikh Badr got the land where the Knesset, the Hilton and Binyanei Ha-Umma, once Khirbet al-Umma, are today.

13 Sitt Badriwa and Sitt Humiyadiwa, now buried in the village of Shararat, inherited Sheikh Badr's power over the sanctity of rain.

14 The 10th Roman Legion built fortifications in the area as

well as an elaborate brick and pipe works.

**15** For a long time, gold was thought to have been buried in the caves scattered around the fields. Many Roman coins were found.

**16** One of the rituals of the Urfalis in Nahlaot was to throw their children's first milkteeth into the fields of Sheikh Badr which, because of its distance, could be considered a substitute for the sacrifice to Azazel.

**17** Sima Kedmi, now a resident, said: "The first thing I remember from Sheikh Badr was seeing a building blown up and 10 Arab women expelled. Their hands were raised and their children were on their shoulders—they said: 'The Jews are attacking us.' I'll never forget those words."

**18** The evacuation of Jewish families from neighbourhoods in the North of the city was not carried out without some resistance. Housed on mattresses in a school, they refused to leave for the empty houses of Sheikh Badr. Sanctions imposed against them, including cutting off the money they were getting for sustenance, didn't help. The few belongings they'd managed to salvage were finally piled onto trucks by the National Guard. The people protested to the Neighbourhood Committee and tried to resist the National Guard, but they too were piled into trucks and taken to Sheikh Badr. After they arrived, the British even had to be called in to restore order.

**19** David Ben Gurion offered 100 liras to families with 10 children.

**20** The residents, mostly Iraqis, Kurds and Urfalis, worked as street-cleaners, shepherds, construction workers, stone-cutters and peddlers.

**21** Many years passed before the municipality connected the neighbourhood to the city water and power system.

22 More land was needed for the Heliport, the Foreign Ministry and the Hilton.

23 Ya'aqub Shalom and his wife had to be hospitalized after Amidar tore their house down with them still in it.

24 One of the oldest remaining residents, Sara Elbaz, said: "When a house is destroyed I fall apart, I tremble, it makes me feel sick."

25 The area was used by both the Hagana and the Irgun to settle accounts, some of which are still secret. People from the neighbourhood still remember seeing British soldiers dangling in front of Haddassa Shalom's window.

26 A double agent who worked for both the British and the Jewish Agency was shot there. Someone who had been in charge of guarding her said: "After the interrogation they told me to get her out of there and let her have one in the head. I couldn't do it so David Efrali took her over to where the Foreign Ministry is now and let her have it."

27 Another time, an Irgun man was rubbed out there by the Hagana.

28 Some of the refugees from Sheikh Badr now live near Ramallah in El-Amri camp along with people from Kolonia (Molsa), Lilla and Malha. Sheikh Mahmoud Silmiyya, a religious instructor who was 16 when the Irgun raids began and whose house is now used by soldiers as a lookout point over the camp, said: "When we fled, we thought we'd be back in a week or two. In the end, it took me 40 years to make it back for a visit. I saw that the doors on my house were the same doors and the stone the same stone."

29 In an effort to complete the plans for Democracy Hill—an area that would house the state's judiciary, parliamentary and executive installations—attempts have been made to evict the remaining residents.

30 One of them said: "If they try to get rid of us, there'll be murder here."

31 Of his own house, Sheikh Mahmoud Silmiyya said: "They want to destroy it so we'll never come back. When you destroy a house, you've destroyed any chance for peace."

32 I'd envisaged Sheikh Badr as an austere but intense man wrapped in a white winding sheet. This image came to me from a painting by Mershad Berber, an artist from Sarajevo.

33 In the right corner a Sheikh framed in a charcoal box and wrapped in a white turban looked out over a Turkish grave at wild brown horses running off behind the portrait of a woman drawn within a large gold icon taken from Velazquez. I somehow thought that Sheikh Badr needed to be drawn from all angles simultaneously, as if the Hilton was exerting as much pressure on him as a pyramid.

34 I asked a friend of mine if she could do some preliminary sketches.

35 Meanwhile, I planned the set: a series of at least five clear sliding panels with maps and pictures on them so the layers could overlap and the two people on stage, a man and a woman, could traverse the whole terrain. Above them and the panels would be a man in a glass booth doing simultaneous translations of whatever happened to be coming in over a shortwave radio continually and slowly dialled up and down the bands.

36 Since my friend hadn't come up with anything yet and I didn't have the material to work on the panels, I started putting together a story board with photographs whose original intention had been to serve as substitutes for some tapes of random noise I hadn't yet recorded.

37 Shortly after finishing this, we went to Cairo and it gave me the feeling that I had to find a way of rethinking things.