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Lifta's Imaginary Future

Plans for a luxury development in an abandoned Arab village may have been scrapped - but dreams of restoring Lifta to its former glory are likely to remain just that.

Esther Zandberg | Feb 09, 2012 4:43 AM

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The Jerusalem District Court did the right thing this week when it canceled an Israel Lands Administration plan to build a luxury residential neighborhood in Lifta that threatened to erase any memory of the Arab village.

Lifta, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, is the only abandoned Arab village in Israel that has remained intact since the War of Independence, and it has become a symbol of the destruction of the Palestinian community in this country. The only thing left to do now is to protect Lifta from architecture lovers and preservationists who paradoxically may cause the Palestinian memory of this place to vanish into oblivion, specifically as they attempt to preserve it.



Lifta. Would vanish into oblivion if it were turned into a fake tourist attraction.

Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

The same would be true if Lifta were turned into a fake and toy-like tourist attraction like Old Jaffa, or preserved as a romantic "artists village" like Ein Hod or Ein Kerem, which were built on quaint Palestinian villages after their residents fled.

Following the court's historic decision, here is a fantasy of what Lifta might have become - a scenario that could have remedied the historical injustice, even if only symbolically. This fantasy situation appeared in Haaretz a year ago during a previous round of discussions on Lifta's fate:

Thanks to a plan the Israel Lands Administration promoted together with the families of original residents, the village has been reborn. The streets are bustling, tourism and commerce are thriving, and the old mosque has been refurbished. The 55 historic buildings in the village that were spared destruction have been renovated and converted to new uses, including a historical museum that Jewish and Arab students visit as part of their civics studies to learn Lifta's story.

There are new homes in the village built in a variety of styles typical of Arab communities in Israel, and quite a bit of the original village's authentic character has been lost. But even ardent advocates of preservation would have to agree that the historic justice carried out is worth the price.

This is all a fantasy, of course - a distant dream with no chance of being realized in Israeli reality even after the court canceled the Israel Lands Administration's construction plans for the village. Like the administration's plan, this fantasy is also political, and perhaps both lack planning logic. Still, some residents of nearby Arab neighborhoods long desperately for this.



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