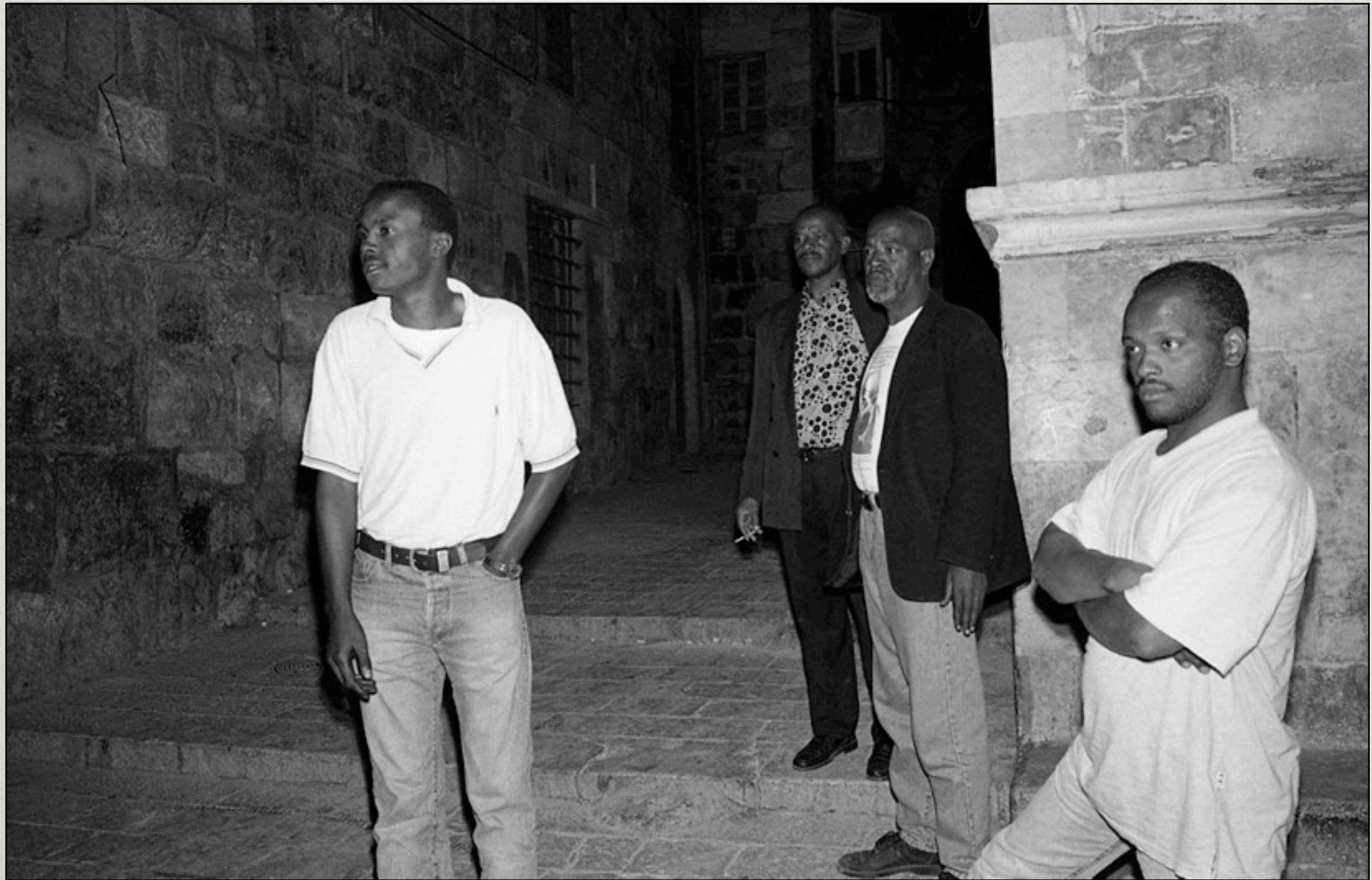


GUARDIANS OF THE MOSQUE

AFRICAN PALESTINIANS OF JERUSALEM



photography by

Andrew Courtney



THE COMMUNITY



The African Palestinian community of Jerusalem is in the heart of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Walk through the busy Damascus Gate and the market streets, passing the 4th and 5th Stations of the Cross. The paving stones have been polished by foot traffic for 2000 years or more. Spice aromas, the Muezzin calls and church bells ringing lead to the almost hidden African Palestinian quarter. Here, the African Palestinians live on both sides of Al'a ad Deen Street, ending at the great door of the Haram al Sherif (Noble Sanctuary Plaza).



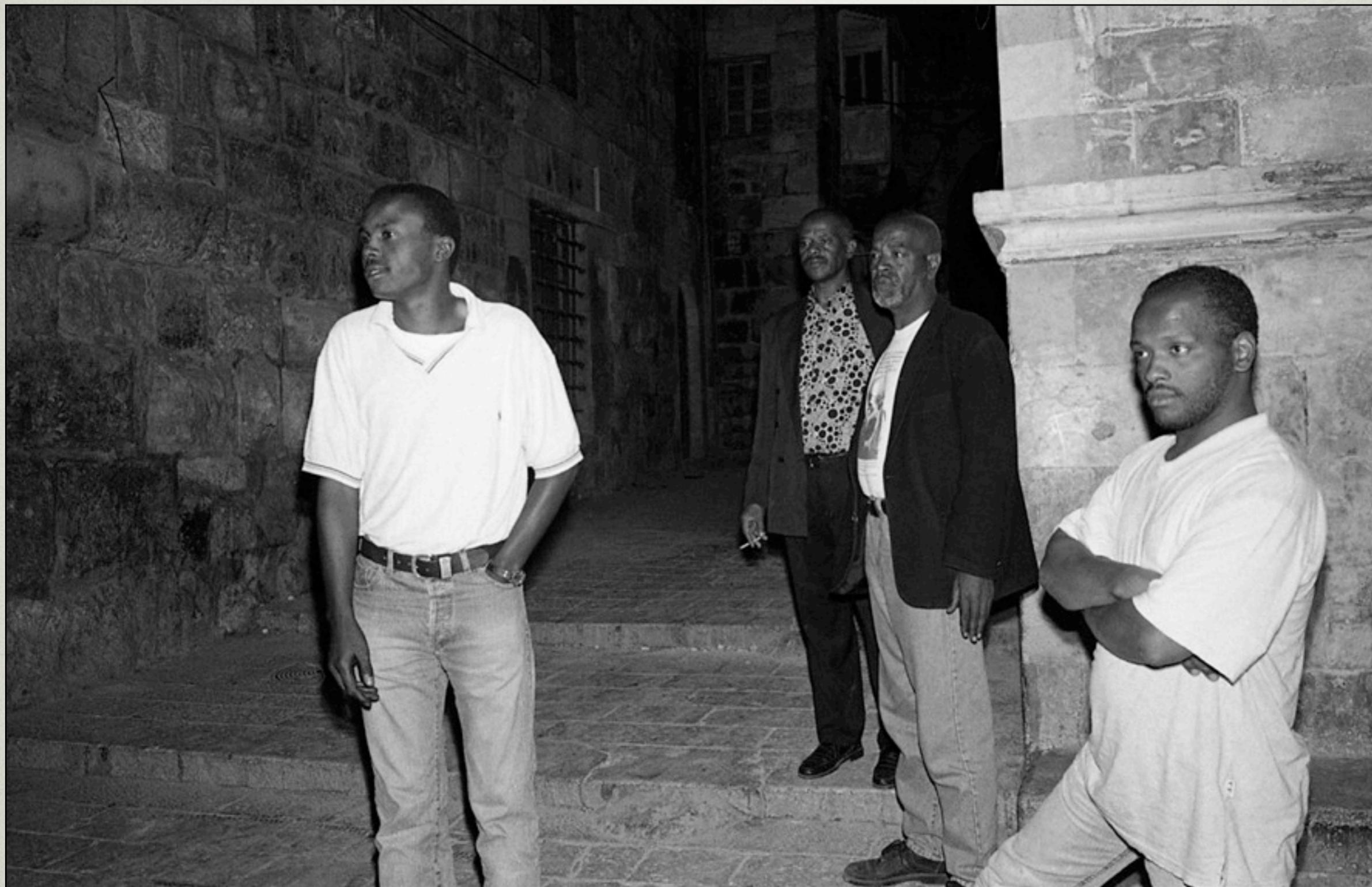
Habs al Ribat entrance



Habs Al' a ad Deen Gate



Steps to the Noble Sanctuary



Guardians



Ali Jiddah and Mohammed Hassan Bulalla



Eid with children



Bab al Majlis, the street of the Council Gate



Some 50 families, comprising 300 or more people, live in apartment blocks on both sides of the street. Called Ribats, these apartment blocks were originally built as hostels for pilgrims of the 13th century Mamluk period. The Habs Ad Dam, a prison during the latter part of the Ottoman era for those condemned to death, stands across the street from the Habs Al Ribat, built for short-term prisoners. At the start of the British Mandate period (1918), the former prisons (Habs) were given by the Islamic Wapf authorities to the African Palestinian families to serve as residences, and they remain so today. The wrought iron prison bars still define small windows and entry gates.



Courtyard decorations welcoming residents returning from the Hajj



Tamam in family courtyard



Habs al Ribat courtyard



Adnan Jiddah and his daughter Hibah



Yasser Quos, Executive Manager, African Community Society



Mousa Quos, community leader



It is noteworthy that the African Palestinians of Jerusalem consider themselves proud, steadfast Palestinians. Since the 1967 war and occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, most of the community has been directly involved in the resistance. Many have served long sentences in Israeli prisons, as have many other Palestinians in the territories. With the 1967 war, a quarter of the African Palestinian community became refugees in surrounding countries, particularly Jordan and Lebanon. They currently cannot return.

Ali Jiddah served 17 years of a life sentence, before release in a 1985 prisoner swap. He now works as a political tour guide in the Old City.

Fatima Bernawi, one of the first women prisoners, served a similar sentence. Later freed, she ironically served as police chief in Gaza for the Palestine Authority.

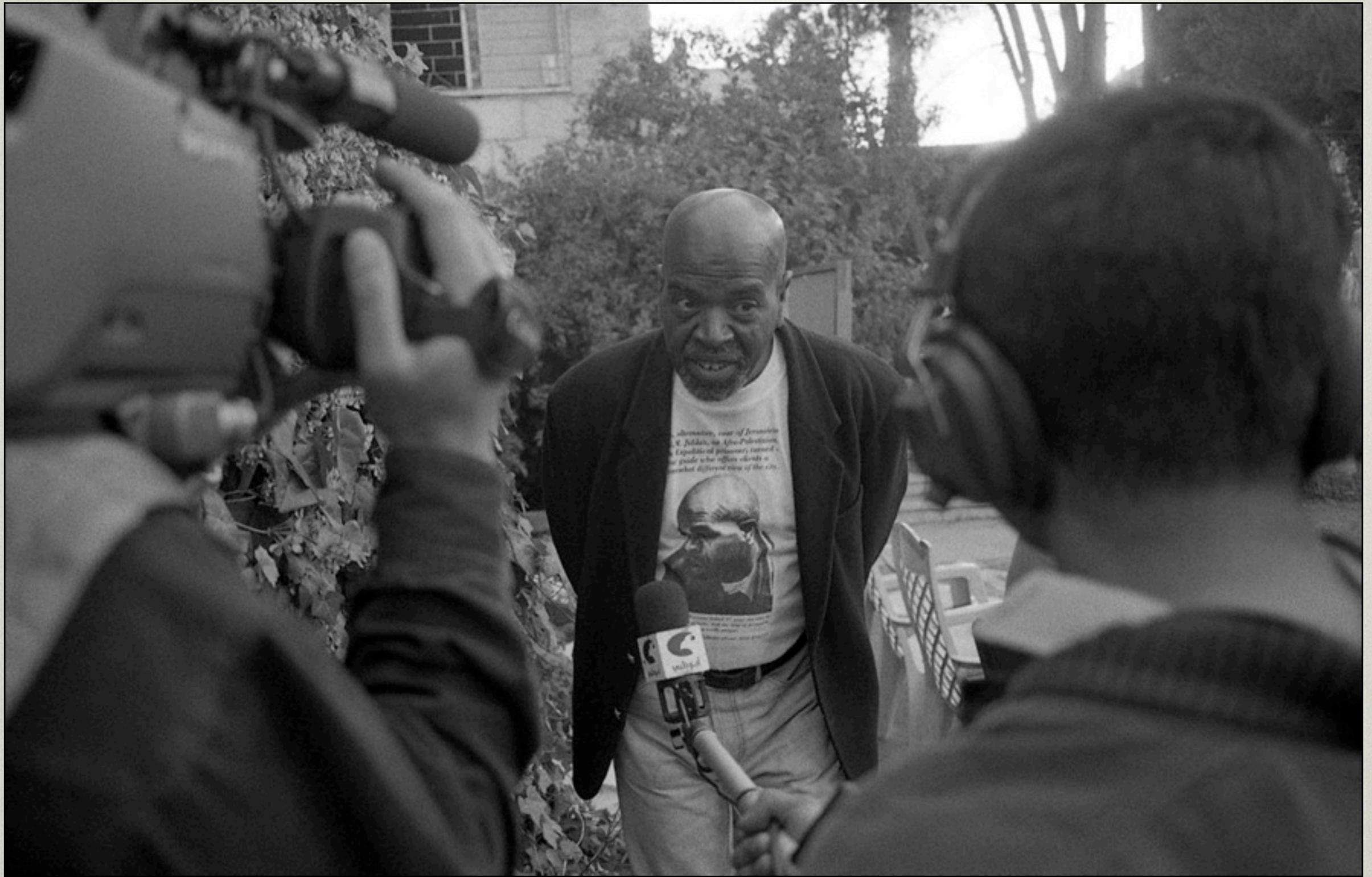
Ali Jiddah says that he and all Palestinians now live in a larger prison defined by the eight-meter high “separation wall,” snaking 400 miles through Jerusalem and the West Bank. The wall protects Jewish settlements—and bifurcates Palestinian villages and farmlands. Ordinary family visits or commutes to work become difficult and humiliating journeys, caused by the Jewish-only roads, military checkpoints, and the wall.



Ali Jiddah arranges an "Alternative Tour" of the Old City



Ali and American visitor Gail Walker



Ali and Palestinian Press



Ali and IDF soldiers at the Damascus Gate



Mother and son, Jericho



Zahra, Palestinian Policewoman



Children, Jericho



Tamam and Khadejeh Kanambo



African Palestinians came to the Holy City as Hajj pilgrims, mainly from Chad, Sudan, Niger and Senegal. Among the African ethnic groups are the Al Salamat, Al Housa, Al Barquo, Al Falata and Al Balata. And Qanembou and Boulala.

As early as the Mamluk era, the Jerusalem Wapf (Islamic authority) honored the African Palestinian community with an historic role as Guardians of the Mosque, due to both their proximity to the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Haram Al Sherif, and their high regard in the larger Palestinian community. Known for their integrity and courage, even today some from the community are bodyguards at East Jerusalem consulates and embassies, and for the Palestinian leadership.

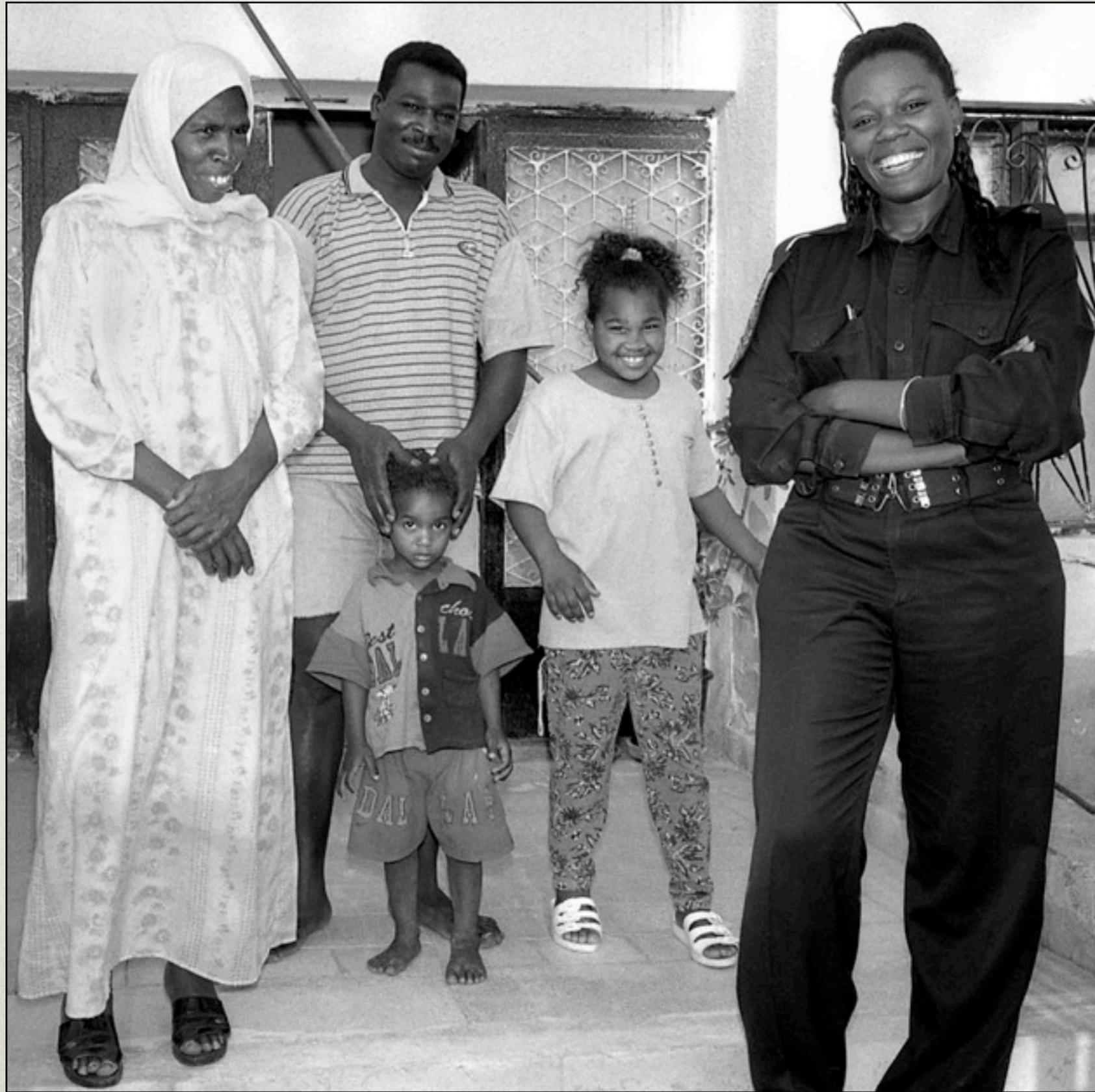
Because Israel has annexed all of Jerusalem and is expanding the municipality, the African Palestinians, and all other East Jerusalem residents, cannot avail themselves of Palestinian passports and travel documents. Instead, they must choose (or not) to obtain Israeli identification for foreign travel. They live in legal limbo.



Habs al Ribat and children



Family Group



Takrouri Family, Jericho



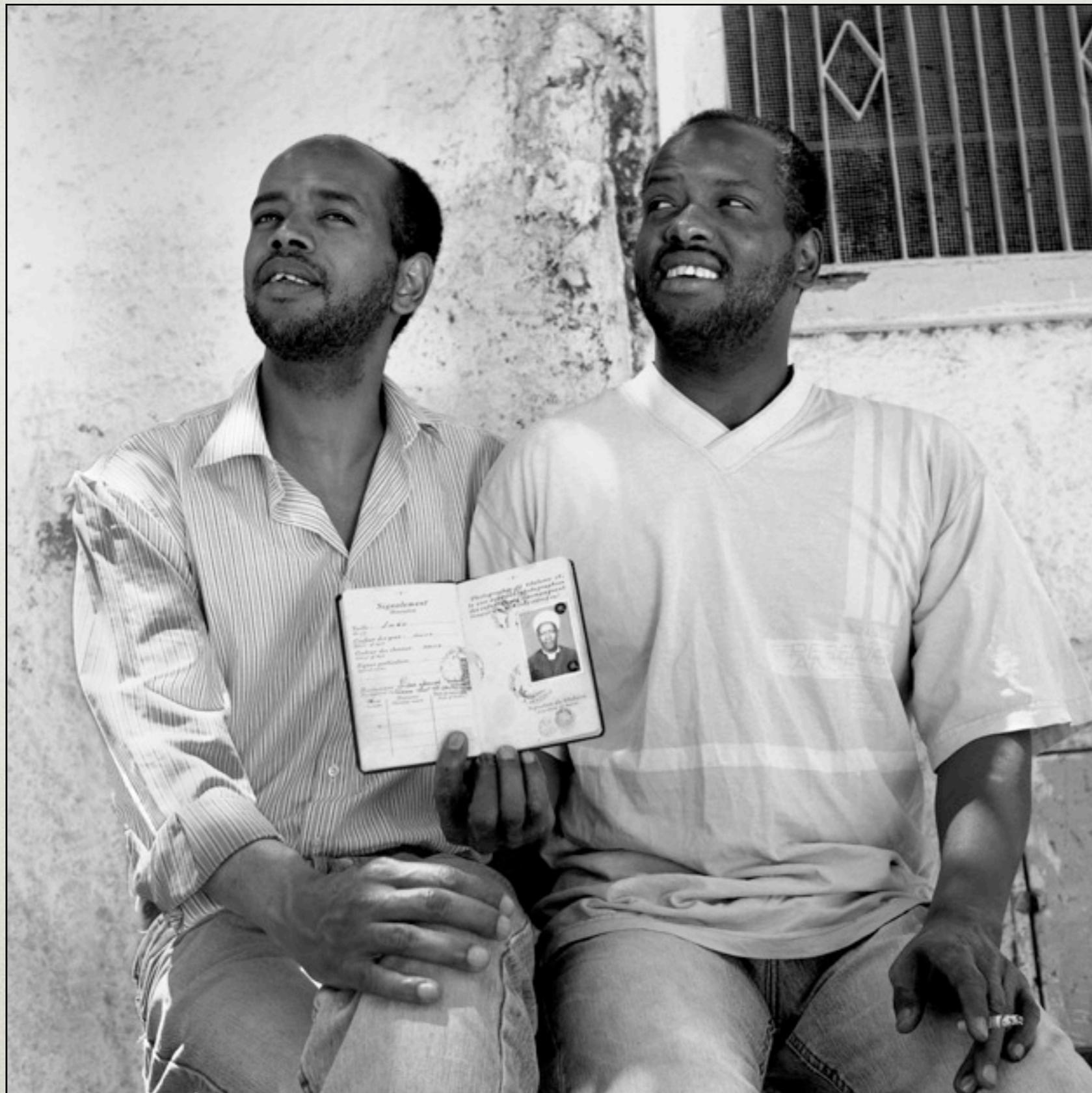
Mohammed Jiddah and son Ali Jiddah



Zakia and Tamam Kanambo



Eid prepares Mulukhiya



Mousa and Eid Quos with father's passport from Chad



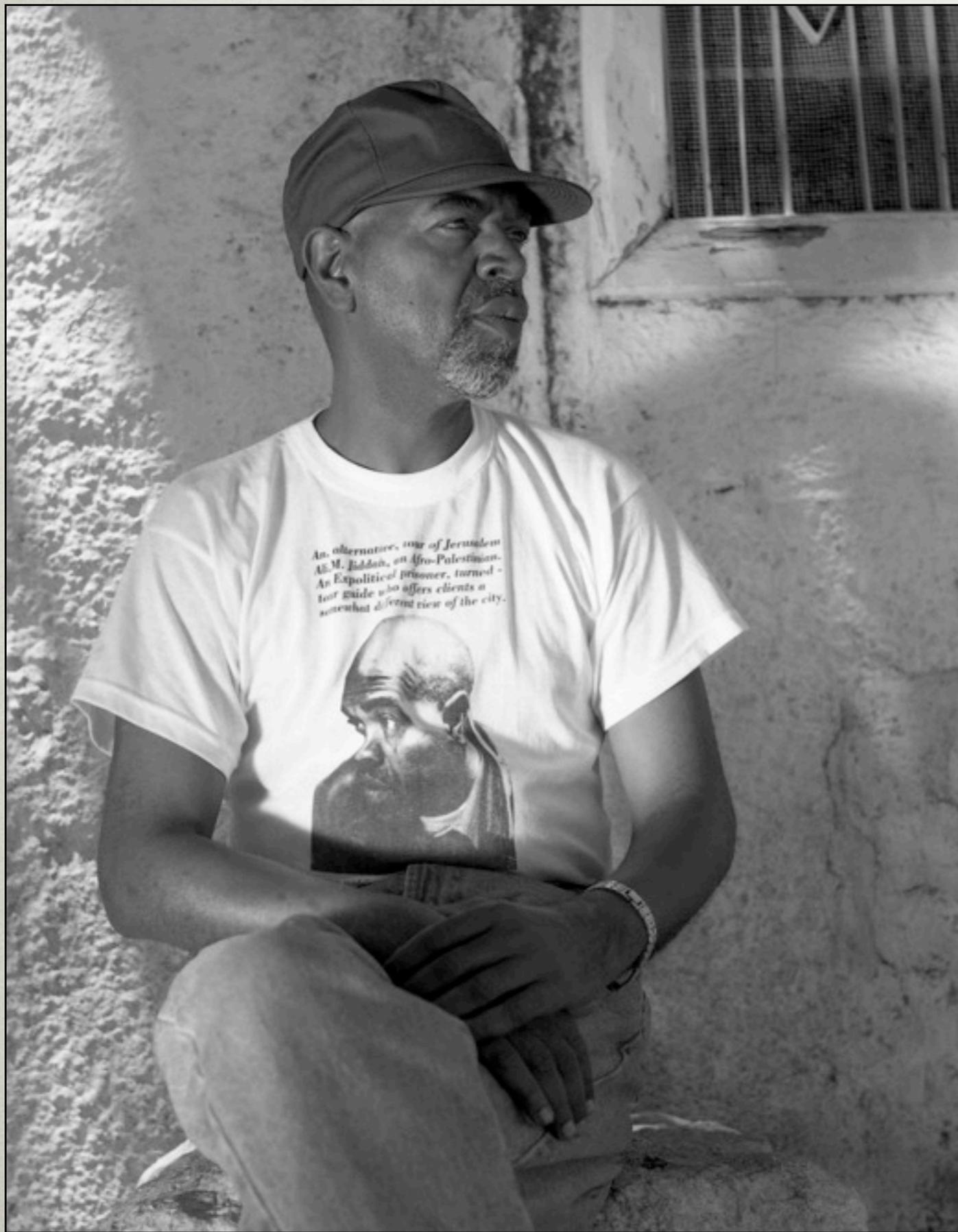
In spite of very poor economic conditions, inadequate funding for schools, and few available jobs, the African Palestinian community has established the Qalawun Community Center. The center provides programs for students, as well as space for cultural solidarity gatherings and ceremonies, and is open to all East Jerusalem residents.

Ali, Tamam, and Mousa, whose portraits appear in this work, have shared with visitors the concept of “Sumoud.” A direct translation from Arabic is “steadfast.” But it is more than this.

One can see and feel Sumoud on the faces—and sense it in the words and the bearing—of the African Palestinians in Jerusalem. Their quiet perseverance and resilience endures, just footsteps away from both the omnipresent Israeli occupation and the treasured historical holy sites.



PORTRAITS



Ali Mohammed Jiddah



Khadejeh Jibril



Mohammed Hassan Bulalla



Hawa Mohammed Kanambo



Mohammed Ahmad Jiddah "the Mukhtar"



Sameeha Jibril Kanambo and baby Sajah



Mousa Mohammed Quos



Zuhra Mohammed al Qadi

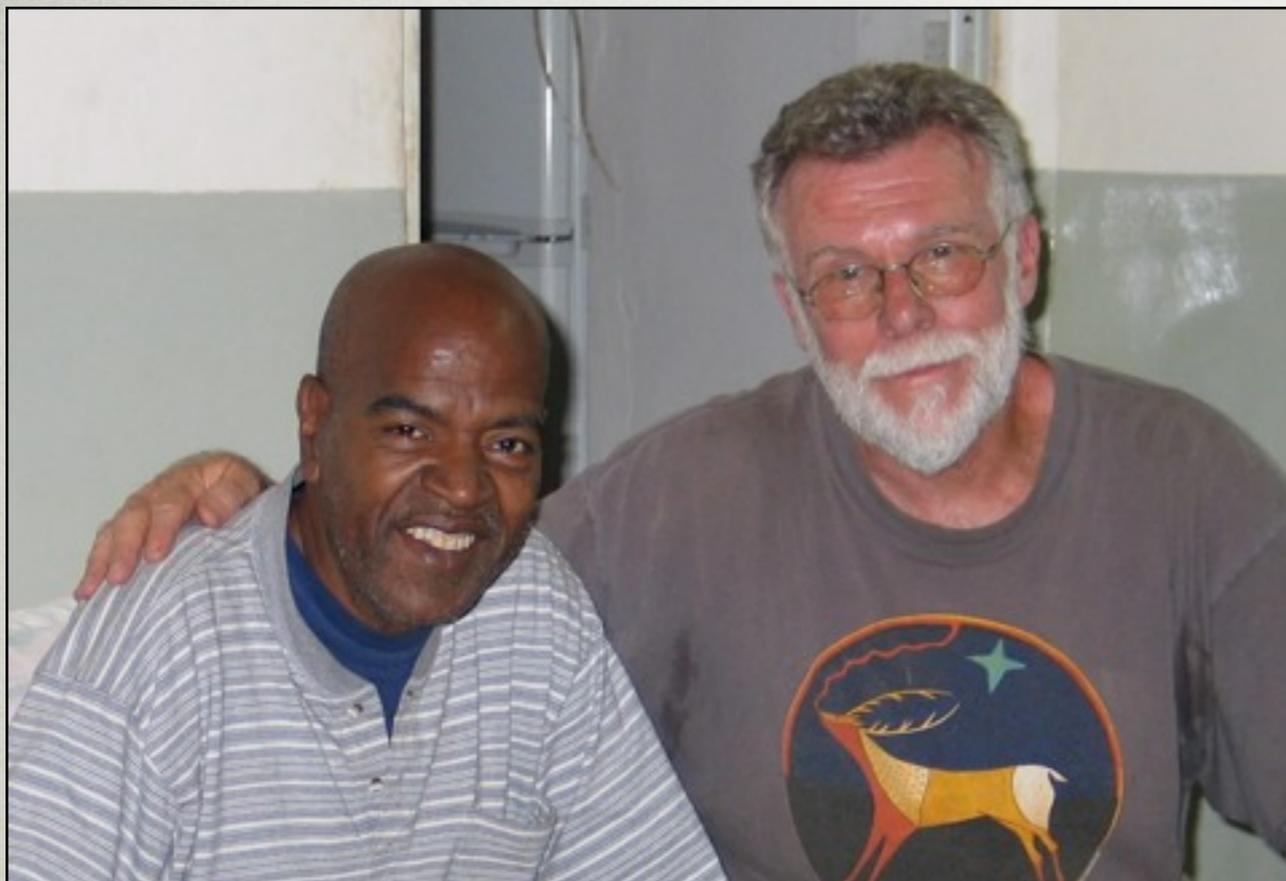


Suleiman Abdul Jalil Idriss
and child Abdel al Qadi



THANK YOU

Sobhi al Zobeidi
Ron Carran
Sylvanie Douf
Kev Filmore
Mirene Ghossein
Ali Jiddah
Tamam Kanambo
Mary Nazzal
Dagmar Painter
Emily Perry
Kendahl Radcliffe
John Shearer
Brian Stanton
Gail Walker



PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE

Courtney's photographs are intimate portraits of members of this community.

This current body of work represents two decades of his ongoing relationship with the African Palestinians of Jerusalem.

To see his film "African Palestinian: Ali Jiddah" visit www.redhillfilms.com

Graphic Designer Ron Carran