



KUTLU
SOKAK
Blessed Street

Photographs by Laurence Salzmann

Kutlu Sokak: Blessed Street

Photographs by Laurence Salzmann
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KUTLU SOKAK Blessed Street

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KUTLU SOKAK: Blessed Street – A Moment in Time

Kutlu Street, which roughly translates as Blessed or Happy Street, is located in Istanbul on the hills above Kabatas and down the hill somewhat from Taksim, a center square.

In the mid 1980s, our family bought a flat in a broken down building on Kutlu Sokak, which if truth be told was not a real street but a series of steps that climbed up the hill to the building where our flat was located. If you continued walking up the steps of Kutlu Sokak you came to a series of streets that led to other streets that eventually led you to Taksim Square. We lived there for several years. I was engaged in a 5 year long documentary photographic and film project to document the Jewish Communities of Turkey; my wife Ayse was the director of the American Field Service programs for Turkey, a program that long before, in the 1950s had sent her to live in Cadillac, Michigan and our daughter Han, then aged 6-9 attended Namik Kemal İlk Okul, a primary school, just down the hill from where we lived.

The flat was 3 stories up from the ground floor of the building. However, to reach the building's entrance if you were coming from below you would have had to already walk up about 8 flights of steps to arrive at the front door to the building. We had a slight view of the Bosphurs from a side window and could hear the fog horns and sounds of SeaGulls and the ubiquitous calls to prayer from the nearby minarets throughout the day. The flat's main set of windows looked somewhat north onto a checkerboard series of tiled roofs. The Syriac Catholic Church, on nearby Gümüşsuyu, Saray Arkası Sokak in the distance was featured in many of the photos seen from our window.

Our flat was small but ample. Its larger room served as our bedroom, living room and dining room all in one. A smaller room with a bunk bed provided space for our daughter Han. We built out a bathroom on what was a back balcony. The kitchen was in a narrow hallway with a two-burner propane gas stove. In winter months, without central heating we would stretch a plastic sheet over the main set of windows to keep the heat generated from our small electric heater from escaping. This was before gas was widely installed in Istanbul and when in winter the bituminous coal used to heat the larger more upscale buildings created a kind of fog-smog. A kind of melancholy feeling prevailed which Orhan Pamuk in his book, *Memories and the City*, is fond of calling "*hüzün*."

* Hüzün is a Turkish word that has an Arabic root. Found the Qur'an as *huzn* and *hazen*. It has much the same meaning as it does in contemporary Turkish pain and sorrow over a loss or death. Pamuk elaborates it meaning further to be kind of melancholy for something lost going back far in time.

The *hüzün* or melancholy that Pamuk talks about was a kind of feeling that seemed to envelop Istanbul at the time we lived there. Sad and beautiful. The sun breaking through Istanbul's often overcast skies cast a magic light over the view from our window. That coupled with the varied extraneous sounds of street vendors of yogurt, vegetables and at night bozo, (a fermented beverage), the calls from itinerant knife sharpeners, rug beaters and gypsies with dancing bears who walked up and down completed my memory of Kutlu Sokak.

One day a street cat managed to climb up and gain entry to our apt through an open window. We named her Boncuk (Little Jewell). She she became the family's favorite pet and returned with us to Philadelphia where she lived on for another fifteen years.

The Kutlu Sokak's flat windows presented a whole new world to photograph. Close and distant. To the casual viewer they may all seem the same, however, if looked at closely you will see the differences from one image to the next even if just very subtly. The plastic sheet I had hung over its windows acted as an impressionistic diffusion filter for my lens. Perhaps unconsciously I was thinking of the works of Monet, whose 30+ some impressionist paintings of the Rouen Cathedral explored how the time of day and weather enabled him to paint a slightly different painting with each canvas. In a likewise manner, the changing quality of the light and its effect on the roof scapes permitted me with almost every exposure to create a photograph that was just slightly different from the one preceding it. Those many elements combined to make my Kutlu Sokak photographs somewhat painterly. In a symbolic way they are my own hüzün. A growing melancholy and longing for a past where age and time now renders it just a memory: A Moment in Time.

Laurence Salzmänn, 2023





“And before long, the music, the views rushing past the window, my fathers voice and the narrow cobblestone streets all merged into one, and it seemed to me that while we would never find answers to these fundamental questions, it was good for us to ask them anyway.”

Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul: Memories and the City

“Bir süre sonra, dinlediğim müzik, arabanın penceresinden akan İstanbul görüntüleri, babamın “buraya da sapalım mı?” diye gülümseyerek arabayı soktuğu parke kaplı kimi dar sokakların ve kaldırımların havası, hepsi kafamda birleşir ve bana hayatta sorduğumuz temel sorulara hiçbir zaman bir cevap bulamayacağımızı, ama onları sormamızın iyi olduğunu....”

Orhan Pamuk, İstanbul: Anılar ve Şehir

“To be able to see the Bosphorus, even from afar—for İstanbul this is a matter of spiritual import that may explain why windows looking out onto the sea are like the mihrabs in mosques, the altars in Christian churches, and the tevans in synagogues, and why all the chairs, sofas, and dining tables in our Bosphorus-facing sitting rooms are arranged to face the view.”

Orhan Pamuk, İstanbul: Memories and the City

“Boğaz’ı uzaktan da olsa görebilmenin taşıdığı bu manevi anlam yüzünden olsa gerek, İstanbul evlerinde, denizi gören pencere, camilerdeki mihrabın (kiliselerde altarın, sinagoglarda tevanın) yerini almıştır ve oturma odalarında koltuklar, divanlar, sandalyeler, yemek masası hep oraya bakar bir şekilde yerleştirilir.”

Orhan Pamuk, İstanbul: Anılar ve Şehir









“Hüzün does not just paralyze the inhabitants of Istanbul, it also gives them poetic license to be paralyzed.”

“If I see my city as beautiful and bewitching, then my life must be so too.”

Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*

“Hüzün, İstanbulluyu hem tutuk yapar, hem de tutukluğuna bir mazeret olur.”

“Şehir bize güzel ve büyülü geliyorsa hayatımız da öyle olmalıdır.”

Orhan Pamuk, *İstanbul: Anılar ve Şehir*



























Afterword A Moment in Time comments by the photographer

Looking back now from the present to a recent past I feel that many of my photographic projects undertaken over some 50 years has what could be called a nostalgia for a past that cannot be returned to.

In the forward to this book, I mentioned a feeling of Huzun that seemed to envelop Istanbul in the mid eighties. Huzun which I have extended to mean having a nostalgia for the past has been perhaps unconsciously a part of my own work as a documentary photographer/filmmaker for many years.

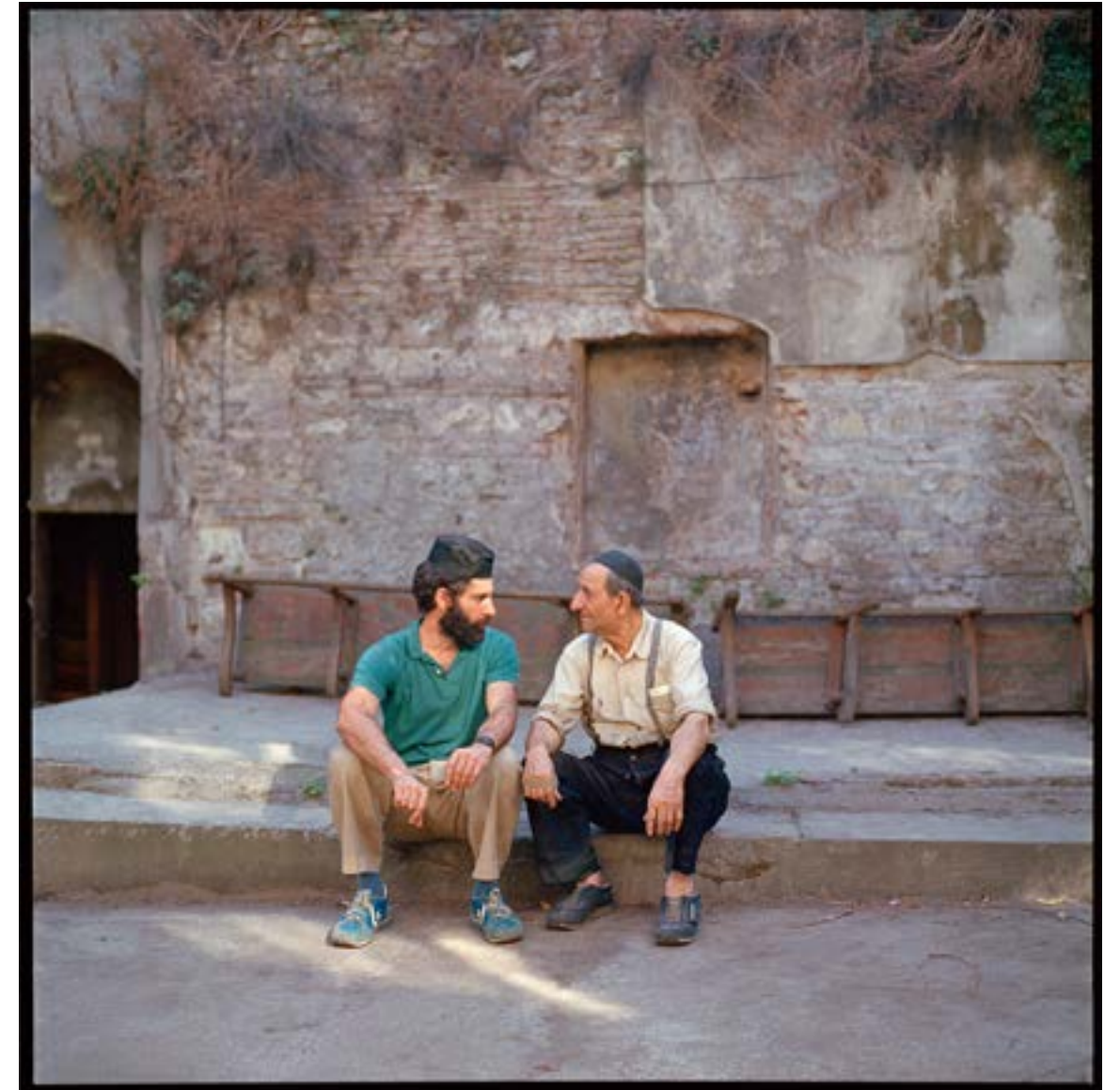
My first film project in my late teens was a film entitled the Ragman which told story of a ragman who used a horse drawn cart in the early sixties to meander about the streets of Philadelphia in search of rags and scrap metals that were the source of the income that supported him.

Many years and projects later, I was commissioned to work on a documentary photo and film project to document Jewish monuments throughout Antolia that were in a state of decay. The communities they once served had moved on. In some few cases like Tire, Bergama and Gaziantep there were one or two Jews left. Together with my wife Ayse and our 6 year old daughter Han we set out on journey throughout Turkey to discover the the monuments and communities they had once served. In some places we found one or two Jewish people still remaining in places like Tire, Bergaman, Gelibolu, and Cannakale. In other towns there were just the Muslim Turkish neighbors who told stories of the Jews who had been their neighbors years before.

Jews have had a long history in Anatolia. There are mentions of Jewish Communities in both the new and old testaments. According to the bible Noah's Ark landed on the top of Mount Ararat, a mountain in eastern Anatolia.

The stories of these communities and the communities living in Istanbul and Izmir is told in greater length in our books: *Travels in Search of Turkey's Jews*, *Anyos Munchos i Buenos* and film *Turkey's Sephardim: 500 Years*.

My most recent documentary film and photographic projects in Peru supported by a Fulbright Grant has been to explore ways in which traces of the pre Columbian pre Spanish Conquest of Peru still manifest itself in the culture of Peru today especially in the Sacred Valley of Cusco. These newer works use documentary and abstract modes to explore the connections between past and present. The book, *Sweet Salt People*, *Sweet Salt* and film *The Last Inca* explore these connections.



Laurence engaged in a conversation with Simon Tov, the Gabay (caretaker) of the Yanbal synagogue of Balat an old quarter of Istanbul along the edge of the Golden Horn. The syngogue is now closed.



The synagogue of Ortakoy once allowed space for a Turkish mattress shop to be nestled next to its exterior wall. Security concerns have eliminated the shop and made gaining entrance to the synagogue more difficult.



Dolmush a shared taxi-dolmush stop out of the lower synagogue of Kuzuncuk on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. The old style American cars in which up to 8 people stuffed themselves have been replaced by indispict mini vans and one of the vestiges of Isanbul's recent past is just that now.

“If I see my city as beautiful
and bewitching, then my
life must be so too.”

Orhan Pamuk, İstanbul:
Memories and the City

“Şehir bize güzel ve
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Orhan Pamuk, İstanbul:
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