
1 The Palestinians and 1948: the underlying causes of failure

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Between early spring and late fall of 1948, Arab Palestine was radically transformed. At the beginning of that year, Arabs constituted over two-thirds of the population of the country, and were a majority in fifteen of the country's sixteen sub-districts.¹ Beyond this, Arabs owned nearly 90 percent of Palestine's privately owned land.² In a few months of heavy fighting in the early spring of 1948, the military forces of a well-organized Jewish population of just over 600,000 people routed those of an Arab majority more than twice its size. In the months that followed, they decisively defeated several Arab armies, which had entered the country on 15 May 1948. Over this turbulent period, more than half of the nearly 1.4 million Palestinian Arabs were driven from or fled their homes. Those Palestinians who did not flee the conquered areas were reduced to a small minority within the new state of Israel (which now controlled about 77 percent of the territory of Mandatory Palestine). At the end of the fighting, Jordan took over the areas of Palestine controlled by its army west of the Jordan River, while the Egyptian army administered the strip it retained around Gaza, adjacent to its borders. In the wake of this catastrophe – *al-Nakba*, as it was inscribed in Palestinian memory³ – the Palestinians found themselves living under a variety of alien regimes, were dispossessed of the vast bulk of their property, and had lost control over most aspects of their lives.

How and why did this momentous transformation happen? Most conventional accounts of the 1948 War tend to focus on events after 15 May 1948, the date when the state of Israel was founded, and the Arab armies intervened unsuccessfully in Palestine in the wake of the stunning collapse of the Palestinians. In fact, however, the decisive blows to the cohesion of Palestinian society were struck even before 15 May, during the early spring of 1948. Furthermore, it is the central argument of this chapter that the underlying causes of this collapse, and of the larger Palestinian political failure, lay even further in the past, and were related to the constraints on and the structural weaknesses of the Palestinian political institutions, factionalism among the notable stratum which

dominated Palestinian society and politics, and grave shortcomings in leadership.⁴

The specific shocks which led Palestinian society to disintegrate in the weeks before 15 May came as the climax of an escalating series of bombings, ambushes, skirmishes, and pitched battles sparked by the passage of United Nations General Assembly resolution 181 on 29 November 1947, which called for the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. During the first few months of this savage civil war, there were successes and subsequent reverses for both sides in heavy fighting in many parts of the country. However, from the beginning of March until mid-May of 1948, the striking superiority of the armed forces of the Zionist movement, and the concomitant weaknesses of their Arab foes began to tell, and they won a series of conclusive victories over the Palestinians. These victories led to the fall of numerous Arab cities and towns, including several of the largest and most important ones, and of hundreds of Palestinian villages, and the capture of a number of strategic roads, junctions, and positions. The main consequence of these crushing defeats in the spring of 1948 was the expulsion of the first wave of Arabs from Palestine.⁵ This first exodus, before 15 May 1948, involved perhaps half the eventual total of 750,000 or so Palestinians who became refugees as a result of the fighting of 1948-49.⁶

The fifteenth of May 1948 thus marked not only the birth of the state of Israel, but also the definitive defeat of the Palestinians by their Zionist foes, after decades of struggle between the two sides over control of the country. It also serves to mark the approximate mid-point in the expulsion and flight of roughly half of Palestine's Arab population. This crushing defeat ended any lingering hope that the Arab state called for by the United Nations partition plan would ever see the light of day. Instead the putative Arab state was strangled at birth. It was the victim of the superior military capabilities of the nascent state of Israel, the hostility or indifference of all the great powers and most of the Arab states, the collusion of a number of Arab leaders with Britain and Israel against the Palestinians,⁷ and the successive failures of the Palestinians themselves. Important though all these factors were in the defeat of the Palestinians, it is the last one that will be the topic of much of the analysis that follows.

The scope of this defeat must be borne in mind if we are to understand its causes. By the time the fighting ended with the armistices of 1949, more than half the Palestinian people had been uprooted. Those Palestinians who lived in urban areas, who amounted to over 400,000 people at this time or some 30 percent of the total Arab

population of the country, were among the first to be dispossessed.⁸ Even before the state of Israel had been proclaimed on 15 May 1948, most of the Arab inhabitants of Jaffa and Haifa had been dispersed, and the bulk of their property had been seized.⁹ The same thing happened then or very soon afterwards to the Arab residents of the cities and towns of Lydda, Ramla, Acre, Safad, Tiberias, Baysan, and Bir Sabi'.¹⁰ Together with Haifa and Jaffa, these centers included about half of the Palestinian urban population of the country, to which must be added the 30,000 Arabs who lived in the western part of Jerusalem and were driven from their homes at the same time. These new refugees from the urban areas of the country generally tended to be those Palestinians with the highest levels of literacy, skills, wealth, and education.

An even worse fate befell the majority of Palestinians who lived in the countryside, where the decades-old struggle for control of land and strategic locations was being decided massively in favor of the Zionists. More than 400 of the over 500 Arab villages in Palestine had been taken over by the Israeli victors by the time the fighting ended with the 1949 armistices between Israel and the Arab states. The inhabitants of these villages were driven out or fled in terror, their land was confiscated, and they were forbidden to return.¹¹ These were sweeping changes: in the 77 percent of the land area of Palestine which came under Israeli domination, the end result of this process was the creation of a sizable Jewish majority, and the shift of over 18 million of the country's 26 million dunams from Arab to Jewish control.¹² They were long-lasting changes as well: more than half a century later, the basic demographic and property contours created by this seismic event are still extant.

Many explanations have been offered for this debacle, in which Palestinian society crumbled with a rapidity that astonished even its Zionist opponents. The standard semi-official Israeli interpretation of these events – which has decisively shaped the way they have been understood in the West to this day – ascribed responsibility entirely to the Arabs. The core of this explanation was that the Palestinians left because Arab leaders, bent on the destruction of Israel, told them to flee.¹³ Over the past decade or so, a number of scholars, most of them Israeli, using Israeli and British archives, have decisively refuted this interpretation in its entirety.¹⁴ In the process they have fundamentally undermined a number of key myths long propagated by Israel.¹⁵

The Israeli "new historians" have utilized newly discovered evidence from the Zionist and Israeli state archives, and other documents, to confirm in particular these earlier refutations of what turned out to have been entirely baseless claims that Arab leaders told the Palestinians to flee. Much else of importance has been established or clarified by this

newly published revisionist history. Nevertheless, given the Israeli and Western sources from which their data were mainly drawn, and their primary focus on Israel, the analyses of the new historians have related primarily to the actions of Israel and the great powers, and only secondarily to those of the Arab states and the Palestinians. In explaining the actions of the Palestinians, these accounts have generally added little, stressing the superior power of the Zionists, the weakness of Arab social and political cohesion, and the flight of the Arab upper and middle classes before the fighting reached its height.¹⁶

Most Arab histories of what happened in 1948 have tended to stress that the Palestinians were overwhelmed by massively superior force.¹⁷ The focus in these accounts is on the strength of the Zionist forces, the complicity with the Zionists of the withdrawing British, and the invaluable support for them of the United States and the Soviet Union. Other Arab authors stress the alleged collusion between Israel and Transjordan, which fielded by far the most powerful Arab army in Palestine, as well as the relative military weakness of the Arab states and the debilitating internecine divisions among them. Yet others underscore the employment by the Zionist forces of terrorist attacks on civilians, notably at Dayr Yasin,¹⁸ and their intense bombardment of heavily populated urban areas, especially in the major cities of Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem.¹⁹

There can be no question that the Palestinians, although they outnumbered the Jewish population of Palestine, were facing superior forces on a number of levels. This imbalance in favor of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) was naturally not reflected in the traditional Israeli version of the history of the conflict. This version described the Yishuv as outnumbered, beleaguered, and desperate in its conflict with the Palestinians.²⁰ However, this interpretation cannot be sustained by an objective examination either of the facts or of the results of the conflict. One of the most recent Israeli historians of the Palestine War has recognized the imbalance in favor of the Zionists at this time. This account, which is generally unsympathetic to the Palestinians, describes the lack of trained, regular Palestinian forces, the absence of a centralized command structure or a reliable source of weapons, and other elements of Palestinian military weakness, by contrast with the relatively formidable capabilities of the Zionist forces.²¹

Nevertheless, superior though the Zionist forces were in numerous respects, the Palestinians had several apparent advantages. These included their massive predominance in numbers and the presence of hundreds of Arab villages all over the country, notably along many of its most strategic roads. The Palestinian Arabs also had a cadre of veteran

guerrilla fighters and a few competent military leaders who had survived the ferocious British repression of the 1936–39 revolt, and a number of specialists just as willing and able to use terror tactics as any among the Zionists. Finally, they expected that they would receive a degree of support from the surrounding Arab world. If some Jews in Palestine perceived themselves as facing an uphill fight against the Arabs, this was certainly understandable in view of these factors.

Yet when Zionist military capabilities were put to the test against the Palestinians with all their apparent advantages in the decisive battles of the spring of 1948, at the end of the day the Palestinians were not simply beaten, but were routed. Why did this happen? In particular, why were the Palestinians unable to bring such assets as they possessed to bear on the battlefield at the moment of decision? Why were they defeated in virtually all of the important military engagements from late March until the end of the Mandate on 15 May 1948? And why did their defeats in the field lead to the virtual collapse of so much of their society, and the flight of hundreds of thousands of their people?

As we have already noted, in Arab historiography the incapacities and errors of the Palestinians themselves have tended to get relatively little attention – although a few Palestinian historians have tried to examine some of the internal reasons for the Palestinians' failures.²² Instead, the tendency in this historiography has been to focus on causes external to Palestinian society for an explanation of the disasters which befell it in 1948. But explanations that focus on external factors miss a crucial dimension, that of why the Palestinians were so weak, what they might have done better – even given their numerous enemies and the unfavorable balance of power – and why their defeat was so total. Some Arab historians have avoided such issues partly because they were sensitive ones, directing attention to internal Palestinian divisions that still have a painful echo. This also may have happened because such avenues of analysis were seen as serving the Israeli objective of drawing attention away from Israel's responsibility for the events of 1948, notably its expulsion of the Palestinian refugees. In extreme forms, this tendency produces a narrative of the debacle of 1948 that denies the Palestinians agency in what happened, or indeed any responsibility for their own fate.

Before going further, it is important to stress that for all their flaws, the versions of history produced by this traditional Arab historiography are fundamentally different from the Israeli myths of origin that are currently being deconstructed by the Israeli "new historians." This is true notably because it is not a myth that a determined enemy bent on taking control of their homeland subjected the Palestinians to over-

whelming force. It is not a myth, moreover, that as a result of this process the Palestinian people were victims, regardless of what they might have done differently in this situation of formidable difficulty, and of the sins of omission or commission of their leaders. In this, as in so much else in this conflict, there can be no facile equivalence between the two sides, however much some may long for the appearance of Palestinian "new historians" to shatter the "myths" on the Arab side.

Any serious attempt to explain the underlying reasons for the defeat of the Palestinians in 1948, even if it focuses on the less-studied internal causes for this defeat, must do at least two things. First, it must examine events well before that date, since to lay bare the roots of what happened in Palestine in 1948, it is necessary to analyze trends during the preceding decades of the British mandate, if not before that. Second, it must go beyond conventional assertions regarding the debilitating political and military effects of the deep divisions within Palestinian society, and among the elite, and attempt an analysis of these divisions which is not reductionist. Because of the profound impact of the Palestinian revolt of 1936–39 in these and other spheres, it is particularly important to examine this uprising, and the long-lasting effects its failure had on Palestinian society and politics. Finally, such an attempt must explain the striking lack of organization, cohesion, and unanimity in the Palestinian polity before 1948, particularly in view of the contrast with other Arab national movements and with the situation of the Yishuv in the same period. This chapter will make a beginning in some of these directions, although its limited scope naturally precludes a full-scale analysis of all these questions.

The Mandate and the failure of Palestinian institution formation

Palestinian society before 1948 was unquestionably riven by internal divisions, and certainly lacked cohesion in a number of respects. However, in analyzing these internal divisions it is important to avoid the approach which, by comparing Palestinian society exclusively to the Yishuv, concludes with a circular analysis which relates Palestinian political failures to the social backwardness of Palestinian society relative to Jewish society in Palestine. It is more fruitful to compare Palestinian society to other Arab societies, with which it was quite similar, rather than with the Yishuv, with which it was utterly dissimilar in virtually every significant respect.²³ This makes it possible to isolate some of the causes for the political failures of the Palestinian national movement,

essentially by comparing the task it faced to those faced by other Arab national movements at the same time.

On the political level, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the emerging Palestinian Arab polity was denied any of the attributes of "stateness," and any access to the levers of state power. In this respect, the Palestinians were completely unlike the Yishuv under the leadership of the Zionist movement, unlike the peoples of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and unlike the peoples in most other colonial and semi-colonial domains in the Middle East and North Africa in the inter-war years. Specifically, they had no international sanction for their national identity, no accepted and agreed upon context within which their putative nationhood and independence could express themselves, and no means of claiming the political or constitutional position which their majority status should "naturally" have brought them.

The contrast with the situation of most of the other Arab countries at the same time is highly illustrative. By 1946, the Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan were already independent states (at least in nominal terms). While Morocco, Tunisia, and most of the Gulf sheikhdoms were European protectorates of different types, they too were at least nominally under the control of their own indigenous governments. Only Algeria (and Libya until the defeat of the Italians during World War II), was a pure colony under direct European rule, where the natives had virtually no rights and little or no control over their own affairs. Algeria and Libya, like Palestine, were the only Arab countries to be the targets of settler colonialism, which reserved most political and other rights to the incoming European settler population, rather than to the indigenous Arab majority. Although Britain and France retained military bases and a measure of control even in nominally independent states in the inter-war period, all of the Arab countries besides Palestine (again with the exception of Libya and Algeria) had recognized indigenous state structures. In every one of them, moreover, it was accepted that sovereignty would ultimately reside with the national majority, in accordance with the Wilsonian principles embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations. This was true even if in virtually every Arab country before World War II, some of the specific powers and attributes of sovereignty were being temporarily withheld by the colonial powers, and even if there was an ongoing struggle for the transfer of these powers and attributes. Thus the positions of the colonial powers in most Arab countries in this period (whether they were mandates or not) were predicated on the assumption that there existed in each case

a people in being or in emergence, with the eventual right to independence and statehood.

The Zionists were in a position analogous to that of these Arab peoples, which was explicitly recognized in the terms of the Mandate for Palestine. The Mandate reprised the wording of the Balfour Declaration in speaking of a "Jewish people" with a right to a "national home," and recognized the Zionist movement, under the name of the Jewish Agency, as a "public body for the purpose of advising and cooperating with the Administration" in order to establish this home.²⁴ In stark contrast, the Palestinians were both explicitly and by omission denied the same national recognition and institutional framework. The Mandate for Palestine as promulgated by the League of Nations on 24 July 1922 mentioned the "civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." The wording of this document is significant, for it does not mention the existence of the Palestinians as a people – they are described only as "non-Jewish communities" – nor their political or national rights. In fact, the Palestinian Arabs as such, who constituted over 90 percent of the population of the country when the British occupied in 1917, are not mentioned by name either in the Balfour Declaration or in the terms of the Mandate. This was certainly not a coincidental omission, as was shown by the way that the Mandate was implemented in the years that followed.

The governmental system set up by the British to execute the terms of the Mandate reflected the basic ideas of that document. The Palestinian Arabs were not given access to any significant positions of authority in the British mandatory government. This was in distinction to the other Class A Mandates, governed under their British and French high commissioners by an *amir* and prime minister in Transjordan, a king and prime minister in Iraq, and presidents and prime ministers in Syria and Lebanon. Even when some of those in these positions were no more than puppets or figureheads, they had nominal authority, and sometimes much more. In Palestine the British high commissioner was the highest, indeed the sole, source of authority in the land. There was no parliament or any other elected representative body, and no cabinet, nor were there any responsible Arab officials. Neither were the Palestinians given the right to create their own powerful, autonomous para-state structure, with recognized international reach, as the Zionists were with the Jewish Agency, which the terms of the Mandate specifically enjoined the British to establish and assist. A 1923 British proposal for an Arab Agency to be appointed by the high commissioner (rather than elected as in the Jewish case) was "a pale reflection of the Jewish

agency," without sanction in the Mandate, and without international standing.²⁵

The significance of the quasi-official status accorded to the Jewish Agency by Britain and the League of Nations through the Mandate cannot be overemphasized. It gave the Zionist movement an international legitimacy and guaranteed access in London and Geneva which were invaluable, besides providing the framework within which the Israeli para-state could be constructed without hindrance, and indeed with ample British support.²⁶ It is hardly an exaggeration to state that the generous support of the greatest imperial power of the age was an invaluable asset for the Zionist movement in overcoming its Palestinian opponents.

Before 1939 there were a few British attempts to redress this structural imbalance of the Mandate regime which favored the Zionists, such as different proposals for a legislative assembly or for an Arab agency. Whether the Palestinians might have obtained tactical advantage by accepting some of these proposals, and turning the resulting institutions to their advantage, or whether their ability to do so would have suffered from the persistent divisions that plagued their elite, is impossible to say. In any case, these proposals were fatally compromised in Arab eyes by the requirement that they accept the terms of the Mandate, which enshrined the inferior status of the Arab majority by comparison with that of the Jews, and denied them the rights which should flow from majority status. In other words, the Palestinian Arabs were not accorded the right of national self-determination and an internationally accepted status as were the Jews of Palestine and as were the peoples of the other Mandates in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Transjordan. Instead, these British proposals (when not withdrawn or nullified by the British themselves) would have allowed the Palestinians to share with the Jews in some of the functions of government. Unlike the Jews, however, they were to do so not by right, as enshrined in the documents defining the Mandate, but on sufferance, as it were.

These are significant factors in assessing the failures of the Palestinians. They meant that they did not have any access to the uncontested and recognized "neutral" forum or entity that a state or a para-state provides. For the Yishuv and for the other Arab countries under the mandate system, such a forum proved invaluable for the polity to coalesce around or compete for, or as a focus for its action, even if complete control over it was denied by the colonial power. As Issa Khalaf wrote: "More fundamentally than self-governing institutions, the lack of effective power over the state meant that the Palestinian Arab

notability which headed the national movement would be unable to use the resources of the state to centralize power in its hands and thereby develop into a cohesive stratum."²⁷

Palestinian politics were thus condemned to an even higher level of frustration than politics in the other Arab countries. In the other mandates, there was a constant struggle with the mandatory power over the powers to be accorded to the national government, but there was no question about the existence or potential sovereignty of this government. In Egypt, the British and their Egyptian allies managed to keep the hugely popular Wafd party out of power for more than half of the thirty years from independence in 1922 until 1952, but vital elements of state power were nevertheless in some sense in Egyptian hands. The European powers maintained military forces in the Arab countries against the will of their populations, but the struggle against them was directed from within the state, or could be when control of the state could be won. This struggle for full independence via liberation from foreign military occupation was successful in most Arab countries within a decade of 1945. The Palestinians never had any such advantages. And they proved unable to create their own autonomous forum from which to challenge the colonial authority and its Zionist protégés, for reasons to be examined below.

The failure of the politics of notables

In analyzing the Palestinians' lack of political cohesion, especially in the crucial decade of the 1930s and afterwards, the lack of access to the mechanisms of state and the absence of any other recognized central national forum does not explain everything. As we have seen, however, it is important for understanding the differences between the situation of the Palestinian polity and that of both the Yishuv and the national movements in other Arab states. There were also other important internal factors specific to Palestine, which help to explain why the Palestinians failed so completely on the political and military levels in the years leading up to 1948.

Deprived of access to control of the state and lacking a para-state forum, the Palestinians held a series of congresses which elected an Arab Executive, headed by Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husayni, which was unrecognized and often ignored by the British, and was largely ineffectual until its demise in 1934. The reasons for this are many. They include the divisions among the Palestinian elite, and their near-unanimous belief that they could persuade the British to change their policy of support for

Zionism. This illusion, born of this elite's immersion during the Ottoman period in what Albert Hourani called "the politics of the notables,"²⁸ whereby they saw themselves as natural intermediaries between local society and the dominant external authority, died hard. As late as 1939, many Palestinian notables apparently seemed to believe that a simple exposition of the justice of the Palestinian case would bring the British to "see reason," abandon Zionism, and grant the Palestinians independence, under their leadership of course.

In this near vacuum, Palestinian Arab politics were increasingly dominated by religious leaderships that had been authorized, encouraged, and subsidized by the British. Indeed the religious-political institutions controlled by these leaders were very much in the nature of an "invented tradition," in the words of Hobsbawm and Ranger.²⁹ After their occupation of the country, the British created the entirely new post of "grand mufti of Palestine" (*al-mufti al-akbar*), who was also designated the "Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestine region" (*mufti al-Quds wal-diyar al-filistiniyya*). There previously had been a *mufti* (scholar of recognized authority to deliver interpretations of Islamic law) of Jerusalem, which had always been an important post in the past, but one both limited both in terms of geographical scope and authority to the city of Jerusalem. In the Ottoman and every other Islamic system, the post of *mufti* was always clearly subordinate in power and prestige to that of the *qadi* (or judge).³⁰ The *qadi* was appointed by the Ottoman state from the ranks of the official Ottoman religious establishment, and almost never came from a local family. The *mufti*, as well as the *qadi*'s deputy, the *na'ib*, who was also chief secretary of the *shari'a* court, were by contrast always local officials.³¹ This existing system was completely restructured by the British, who effectively placed the *mufti* above all other religious officials in Palestine.

Similarly, in keeping with their vision of a Palestine composed of three religious communities (only one of which, the Jews, had national rights and status) the British created the Supreme Muslim Shari'a Council in 1921. This was an entirely new body – another invented tradition – which was entrusted with the revenues of the public *awqaf* (Islamic endowments) in Palestine which had formerly been controlled by the Ottoman state, together with a number of other duties.³² As such it was meant to relieve non-Muslim Great Britain of having to take on directly some of the religious functions that the defunct Ottoman Empire had performed before 1918. In addition to giving the Council control over the considerable public *awqaf* revenues and the patronage which went with them, Britain gave it power to nominate and appoint *qadis*,

members of the *Shari'a* Court of Appeal, and local *muftis*. It could also hire and fire all *awqaf* and *Shari'a* court officials employed with *awqaf* funds.³³

Into both of these newly created positions of unprecedented power of *mufti* and president of the Supreme Muslim Council, the British placed one man, Hajj Amin al-Husayni.³⁴ His appointment as *mufti* in 1921 has been a source of fierce controversy ever since. Hajj Amin al-Husayni, whose brother, and three generations of his family before him, had held the post of Hanafi *mufti* of Jerusalem, was appointed by the British high commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, ahead of other apparently more qualified, and older, candidates. This was a gamble that this young radical, only recently pardoned for his nationalist activities, would serve British interests by maintaining calm in return for his elevation to the post. Despite constant Zionist complaints about him, it could be argued that the gamble paid off for the British until the mid-1930s, when the *mufti* could no longer contain popular passions. Among all the other leaders of national movements in Arab countries during this period (and among Palestinian leaders), the *mufti* was alone in being a leading religious figure, whose base of power was a "traditional" religious institution, albeit a newly invented one.

Because of the considerable assets which Britain had put in his hands, and his consummate political skill, within a decade Husayni had become the dominant Palestinian political leader, and as such a lightning rod for the dissatisfaction of the Zionists. There is an element of amnesiac historiography in the vilification of the *mufti*, influenced by his subsequent career after 1936. In fact, Husayni served the British exceedingly well for the decade and a half after his appointment, at least until 1936 when he felt obliged to align himself with a growing popular rebellion against his former British masters. One indication of how valuable the British perceived the *mufti* to be is the willingness of the notoriously tight-fisted Mandatory administration to subsidize him. When the revenues of the public *awqaf* properties declined after the Great Depression of 1929, and with it the revenues of the Supreme Muslim Council, the latter were supplemented by direct British subventions starting in 1931, which were naturally kept secret.³⁵

Eventually there emerged competing factional, union, and political rivals to the range of institutions that the *mufti* dominated (these institutions included a political party, *al-Hizb al-'Arabi al-Filastini* [the Palestine Arab Party], headed by his cousin, Jamal al-Husayni), but this in the end only increased the factionalism of Palestinian society and

politics. Although the Palestinians were able to present a united front to their foes for many years after World War I, the internal divisions among the elite eventually surfaced, ably exploited by the British, with their vast experience of dividing colonized societies in order to rule them more effectively. They were exploited as well by the Zionists, whose intelligence services presumably engaged in undercover activities among the Arabs in these years that have yet to be fully elucidated.³⁶ Irrespective of what the British and Zionists may have been doing in this regard, the Palestinian notables, deprived of any access to real power and frustrated at every turn by their stronger foes, were hopelessly split. By the 1930s, the Palestinian leadership was polarized between a dominant faction led by the British-appointed mufti, and another even more closely aligned with the British and led by the former mayor of Jerusalem, Raghīb al-Nashashibi, which feuded bitterly with one another.³⁷

To these and other divisions among the elite must be added another one: that between most of the elite and a growing current of discontent among younger Palestinians, intellectuals, and much of the middle classes. Discontent was also rife among the landless former peasants who were flocking to the cities, especially Haifa and Jaffa, and among many in the countryside, saddled with debt to urban merchants and moneylenders.³⁸ Some of them were driven off their lands by Zionist land purchases and the resultant evictions, others by the imposition of a policy of "Hebrew labor" (*avoda ivrit*) by the Yishuv, and others by Arab landlords turning land over to more profitable (and less labor-intensive) citrus cultivation. This malaise was gravely accentuated by economic distress in the early 1930s as the worldwide depression hit Palestine, which had become increasingly integrated into the world economy in the preceding decades.

The situation was further aggravated by the impact of rapidly mounting Jewish immigration, as the rise of the Nazis drove thousands of Jews escaping from Europe to seek refuge in Palestine, at a time when most countries coldly shut their doors to them.³⁹ From 1933 to 1936, the proportion of Jews in the total population of Palestine, which had shrunk or remained stagnant from 1926 to 1932, grew from 18 percent to nearly 30 percent. In the year 1935 alone, at the height of this flood of refugees from Hitler's persecution, almost 62,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine, a number greater than the entire Jewish population of the country as recently as 1919. Whereas at the beginning of the 1930s, the Zionist project might have appeared to some to be a failure because it seemed that the Jews would never overtake the Arabs in population, a few years later, demographic parity and ultimately Zionist

control over the country suddenly seemed to be within the realm of possibility.

The failure of the Arab revolt

The Palestinians naturally had a different view of what the Zionists perceived as a major shift in their favor. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s several sectors of Palestinian society had already grown dissatisfied with the internecine divisions among the notable elite, and the manifest ineffectiveness of its leadership of the national movement. This dissatisfaction had led to various forms of more radical, grass-roots activism. These included support for a policy of boycotting the British, greater anti-British and anti-Zionist activity among youth groups like the Young Men's Muslim Association and various scouting organizations, and the growth in influence of the radical nationalist Independence Party [*Hizb al-Istiqlal*]. The latter called for a rigorous Indian Congress Party-style boycott of the British, a line which naturally failed to appeal to many of those among the notable class who were on the payroll of the Mandatory Administration, including the *mufti*.⁴⁰ Following the out-manoeuvring and containment of most of their initiatives by the traditional elite, notably the *mufti* and his cousin Jamal al-Husayni, by the mid-1930s, these discontented elements eventually reacted more forcefully to what they saw as the mounting peril of the growing size and strength of the Yishuv.

In the context of these mounting tensions, a Haifa preacher, Shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a leading figure in several of these radical movements, was killed in a clash with British police near Jenin in November 1935.⁴¹ His partisans and some later biographers describe him as having been engaged in sparking an armed revolt in the north of Palestine. This was the first attempt at an organized, armed revolt against the British since the beginning of the Mandate, in contrast to more spontaneous outbreaks of violence in 1920, 1921, 1929, and 1933. Although British security forces immediately stamped out the attempt, the Syrian-born Qassam had clearly touched a deep chord in the popular imagination. It soon became evident that he was much more closely in tune with important elements of popular Palestinian sentiment than was most of the elite leadership.⁴² His death in battle was portrayed as a glorious "martyrdom," and huge crowds followed Qassam to his grave near Haifa, in a demonstration that surprised many observers at the time.⁴³ It was followed within a few months by the spontaneous outbreak of a nation-wide general strike in April 1936, which lasted

until October of the same year, claimed by its partisans as the longest general strike in history.

In the wake of the strike, and the subsequent recommendations of a British Royal Commission for partition of the country into a small Jewish state, and an Arab state to be attached to Jordan, an armed uprising spread through the country beginning in the spring of 1937. The final results of this revolt, and of the general strike that preceded it, are crucial to understanding what happened to the Palestinians in the subsequent decade. Over the next 18 months, the British lost control of large areas of the country, including the older parts of the cities of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Hebron, before a massive campaign of repression by tens of thousands of troops and squadrons of aircraft in 1938–39 was able to restore “order.”

The Arab revolt of 1936–39 proved to be a massive failure for the Palestinians, in spite of quite remarkable heroism in the face of daunting odds, and great suffering by much of the Arab population. It obtained no lasting concessions from the British, who in a 1939 White Paper promised that Palestine – by implication a Palestine with an Arab majority – would obtain independence within ten years, a promise which they were ultimately unable to keep. The British promised as well limits on Jewish immigration, a promise that was irrelevant in view of the outbreak of the Second World War, and that proved impossible to implement thereafter following revelation of the Nazi genocide against the Jews, and resultant American pressure. Finally, the White Paper would have placed restrictions on land sales to Jews, but in the event land purchase continued virtually unabated.⁴⁴

Although the Yishuv suffered in various ways during the years of the revolt, on balance it benefited considerably. Arab strikes and boycotts served as justification for completing the implementation of the principle of Hebrew labor which excluded Arab workers from an exclusively Jewish “national” economy, which was substantially fortified as a result. The Arab strike served to provide the pretext that the Zionist leadership needed to demand that the Mandatory authorities permit the construction of a modern port at Tel Aviv. This meant the eventual demise of Jaffa as a port, and with growing control of the Yishuv over the Haifa port, meant that it now dominated even more of the country’s basic infrastructure. The Zionist movement benefited as well from the significant assistance in armaments and military organization that Britain provided in order to fight the common Arab enemy: by the end of the 1930s, 6,000 armed Jewish auxiliary police were helping the British to suppress the last embers of the revolt. By 1939, the Yishuv had achieved the demographic weight, control of strategic areas of land,

and much of the weaponry and military organization that would be needed as a springboard for taking over the country within less than a decade.

For the Palestinians, however, the worst effects of the failure of the revolt were on their own society. These effects were manifold and were felt on several different levels. Purely in terms of Arab casualties of approximately 5,000 killed and 10,000 wounded, and those detained, who totaled 5,679 in 1939,⁴⁵ the suffering was considerable in an Arab population of about a million: over 10 percent of the adult male population was killed, wounded, imprisoned, or exiled.⁴⁶ A high proportion of the Arab casualties included experienced military cadres and enterprising fighters. The British also confiscated large quantities of arms and ammunition during the revolt, and continued to do so during later years.⁴⁷ These heavy military losses were to affect the Palestinians profoundly a few years later when Britain handed the Palestine question over to the United Nations, and it became clear that an open battle for control of the country between Arabs and Jews would take place.

As severe as Palestinian military losses were those in the realm of the economy, and the damage done to the country's social fabric and political coherence by years of strikes, boycotts, and British reprisals. The strike of 1936, and the armed uprising which followed it, not only helped the Zionists to reinforce the separate Jewish economy they had already built up in Palestine: by 1936 the sector of the economy of Palestine controlled by Jews was already bigger than that of the Arabs.⁴⁸ The events of the years 1936–39 further increased the gap between the two sides in favor of the Yishuv, via a series of self-inflicted wounds on the Arab economy. Arab businesses, especially citrus export, quarrying, transportation, and industry, were severely affected by the revolt, as were the Arab port workers of Jaffa. The rebellion in addition had two other negative economic effects, one of which was the levies imposed on the better-off citizens by the rebels to help them finance their activities. These were often extracted in an arbitrary and haphazard fashion, in keeping with the highly decentralized nature of the revolt, and those raising the money were not always dedicated revolutionaries. The other negative effect was the considerable worsening of the economic situation of many landowners, who in consequence were sometimes forced to sell land, which ended up in Jewish hands, thereby undermining one of the main Palestinian national objectives.

Beyond all of these grim results of the revolt, perhaps its most harmful effects were on the social and political levels. In this time of crisis for the Palestinians, their lack of stateness, the absence of a national focus for their political activity, or of strong, independent political parties or

youth groups, combined with the political hegemony of religious institutions dominated by the *mufti*, proved utterly disastrous. By the end of the revolt, the traditional Palestinian leadership, which had been obliged by grass roots pressure to overcome its differences and form a joint national leadership (the Arab Higher Committee) at the outset of the general strike in 1936, was shattered. It became even more bitterly divided by differences over tactics, which were ably exploited by the British. The British exiled many individual leaders in 1937, and others fled, some never to return to the country, notably Hajj Amin al-Husayni himself. The British took over the Supreme Muslim Council, appointing British officials to supervise it, and depriving the *mufti* of its revenues. In this situation, leadership fell to the exiled mufti, the leader who in spite of his distance from the scene of events still had the greatest resources at his disposal and the most charisma, and who had gradually undermined or eclipsed or outlived all of his competitors, from his older relative and rival, Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husayni, to Raghīb Bey al-Nashashibi and Shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam.

The revolt thereafter fell victim both to failures at the top – especially in the *mufti*'s style of leadership, his jealousy of potential rivals, and his identification of the national cause with himself – and to profound weaknesses at the base. For reasons related to his own tactical interests, the *mufti* prevented the rest of the Palestinian leadership from taking actions it was inclined towards, such as accepting the 1939 White Paper, which might not have provided strategic victories, but which could have been to the advantage of the Palestinians. In the case of the White Paper, it is clear that most of the rest of the Palestinian leadership, divided though it was, favored acceptance, possibly with conditions. The *mufti*, surrounded by a few younger and more militant advisors, and afraid of losing his domination over the national movement, refused, and carried the day.⁴⁹ In exile farther and farther away from Palestine, and unaware of the devastating impact on the Palestinians of British repression or of the growth in Zionist strength, the *mufti* was increasingly out of touch with events on the ground, and his policies became more and more unrealistic in the years which followed.

The divided and decentralized nature of the revolt, which at an early stage helped it to harass the British and throw them off balance militarily, proved to be a liability in the end. So did the divisions in Palestinian society between urban factions, rural clans, and individual leaders, from commanders of rural armed bands to urban notables.⁵⁰ The *mufti*'s tactic of treating those who disagreed with him as traitors, which at the height of the revolt often meant a death sentence, caused great suffering and further divided an already fragmented Palestinian

society.⁵¹ This was ultimately a recipe for crushing defeat, given that the Palestinians would need to have been highly united to stand up to the power of a growing Zionist movement, and a British Empire which had not withdrawn from a colonial possession in generations.

Roots of “the Catastrophe”

The net result of the events of the late 1930s was that when the Palestinians faced their most fateful challenge in 1947–49, they were still suffering from the British repression of 1936–39, and were in effect without a unified leadership. Indeed, it might be argued, they were virtually without any leadership at all. The *mufti* was in exile in Beirut after his return from Germany, following a wartime sojourn there which had fatally tainted him in the eyes of many in the West.⁵² He remained jealous of any challenge to his dominance of the national movement, although he was even less capable of leading it effectively from a distance than he had been when he was in Palestine. Other leaders, like Jamal al-Husayni, Dr. Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi, Musa al-‘Alami, and Raghib Bey Nashashibi could neither take the lead on their own, nor cooperate effectively with one another. The Palestinians still had no functioning national-level institutions, no central para-state mechanisms, no serious financial apparatus, and no centralized military force. The reconstituted Arab Higher Committee, which had in any case been little more than a shell in the late 1930s, was an even less substantial body than before. The lack of representative institutions, which had been one of the worst features of Palestinian politics in the first two decades of the Mandate, now weakened the stature and credibility of the Palestinian leadership, and reduced further its feeble capability to mobilize the populace in the face of the growing strength of the Yishuv.

This essay has argued that the crippling nature of the defeat the Palestinians sustained in 1936–39 was among the main reasons for their failure to overcome the challenges of 1947–48 on the diplomatic, political, or military levels.⁵³ Although some of the damage of the revolt had been made up by then, notably on the economic plane, the Palestinians were still suffering greatly from its negative after-effects on their national leadership, social cohesion, and military capabilities. They suffered too from having failed utterly in the preceding decades to establish a neutral national forum or representative national institutions that could be the axis around which to organize their struggle against the British and the Zionists. In consequence, the great sacrifices of the 1936–39 revolt, which seems to have been supported by much of Palestinian society at the outset, and which in different circumstances,

and with better leadership, might have led to gains, were not only wasted, but in fact gravely weakened the Palestinians for their subsequent ordeal.

Thus the Palestinian catastrophe of 1947–49 was predicated on a series of previous failures. The Palestinians entered the fighting which followed the passage of the UN Partition resolution with a deeply divided leadership, exceedingly limited finances, no centrally organized military forces or centralized administrative organs, and no reliable allies. They faced a Jewish society in Palestine which, although small relative to theirs, was politically unified, had centralized para-state institutions, and was exceedingly well led and extremely highly motivated. The full horrors of the Holocaust had just been revealed, if any further spur to determined action to consummate the objectives of Zionism were needed. The Zionists had already achieved territorial contiguity via land holdings and settlements in the shape of an “N”, running north up the coastal strip from Tel Aviv to Haifa, south-east down the Marj Ibn ‘Amir (the Jezreel Valley), and north again up the finger of eastern Galilee.⁵⁴ This was the strategic core of the new state, and the springboard for its expansion.

The outcome of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict of 1947–48 was thus a foregone conclusion. The Palestinians had superior numbers, but as we have seen, the Yishuv had more important advantages: a larger and far more diversified economy,⁵⁵ better finances,⁵⁶ greater firepower, superior organization, and considerable support from the United States and the Soviet Union. All of these factors enabled the nascent Israeli state to triumph over the poorly led, poorly armed, and mainly rural, mainly illiterate Palestinian population of 1.4 million. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the Palestinians have incorporated this and other failures into their national narrative as a case of heroic perseverance against impossible odds.⁵⁷ This draws on a Palestinian perception that they have always faced a constellation of enemies so formidable as to be nearly insuperable. Indeed, it is unimaginable that the British Empire would have abandoned Palestine under Arab pressure on the eve of the Second World War, or that the world would have supported the Palestinians against the nascent Israeli state in the wake of the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, a version of history that starts with the insuperable nature of their foes conveniently absolves the Palestinians for any responsibility for their own fate, since, if their enemies were so numerous and powerful, it is little surprise that they were defeated, and no further analysis is required. However, factors such as the poor political calculations, and the disorganization, confusion, and leaderless

chaos on the Palestinian side, all of which contributed measurably to the debacle, need to be factored into the Palestinian historical narrative. So too does the fact that the Palestinians, still suffering acutely from the after-effects of the defeat of the 1936–39 revolt, and deprived of a central para-state mechanism, a unified leadership, and representative institutions, in consequence never had a chance of retaining control of their country once they were engaged in an all-out military confrontation with the organized forces of the Yishuv.

Attention to all these considerations has been missing in Palestinian nationalist accounts from the 1960s through the 1970s (with little having changed in much of the historiography since then). Ironically, it might be argued that the “national” element was weak in a national movement led by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, a Muslim cleric in a society with a large Christian minority, who came from a notable family with multiple rivals, and who helped stifle the growth of national political parties like the Istiqlal, and independent grass-roots scouting, union, and religious organizations. In 1936–39 and 1947–48 there appeared to be none of the planning on a national level which the Yishuv engaged in nearly from the beginning of the Zionist movement in the late 1890s, and which was evidenced by the Egyptian and Syrian national revolts of 1919 and 1925–26. For all his dominance of Palestinian politics for nearly two decades, Hajj Amin al-Husayni did not approach the stature of a Sa‘d Zaghlul or even a Shukri al-Quwwatli, perhaps most notably because no nationalist political party remotely resembling the Wafd Party, or even the Syrian National Bloc (Kutla Wataniyya), existed in Palestine.

This chapter has paid little attention to the actual course of the fighting in 1947–48. However, in looking at the limited accounts available regarding the Palestinian side of this conflict, one is struck by the extent to which the fighting was a local affair, whereas for the Zionists it was centralized and national. By comparison with 1936–39, indeed, the Palestinians in 1947–49 seem to have been even less organized and even less centralized, and to have had even less of a national focus. Given the analysis in the above pages, we can understand why this may have been the case, and thus some of the basic reasons the Palestinians failed. Perhaps if the Palestinians had managed to hold off their revolt for a decade, or perhaps if they had confronted the British more resolutely or radically earlier on, they might have met with a different outcome. But the might-have-beens of history are ultimately futile. Given the course of Palestinian history until 1948, the underlying causes of what happened in Palestine in that year should be perfectly comprehensible, and the final outcome should not have been unex-

pected, shocked and surprised though many Palestinians clearly were by it.

Notes

- 1 The most reliable and careful study of population in Palestine is by Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine: Population Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate* (New York, 1990). He indicates that the Arab population of Palestine was 1,339,773 in 1946, and the Jewish population 602,586 (p. 37). Both had grown larger by 1948. Figures for population by sub-district are from the United Nations report cited in Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* (Beirut, 1971), p. 678, map, p. 671.
- 2 Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, p. 680, map, p. 673. UN figures, based on British Mandate statistics, show that in 1946 Jews owned 10.6 percent of the privately owned land in Palestine, and Arabs, collectively or privately, owned almost all of the rest. The Arab Office in London, also citing official British figures, calculated that Jews owned no more than 23 percent of arable land in Palestine; cf. *The Future of Palestine* (Geneva, 1947).
- 3 This is the title of the seminal work by Qustantin Zurayq, *Ma'nat al-nakba* [The Meaning of the Catastrophe] (Beirut, 1948), published as *The Meaning of the Disaster* by R. Bayley Winder (Beirut, 1956).
- 4 See Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Albany NY, 1991).
- 5 See Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1987); and Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1994). Among the first to publish the results of their research in the Israeli archives regarding the flight of the Palestinian refugees were Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York, 1986), and Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York, 1987).
- 6 The exact number of refugees is hard to ascertain, and has long been highly disputed, in large part for political reasons. Morris, *The Birth*, p. 1, writes of “some 600,000–760,000” refugees. The former figure is very low, while the latter seems more likely to be correct, and is quite close to UN estimates at the time.
- 7 Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan* (Oxford, 1988) is the best source on this aspect of the 1948 war. See also Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, 1987).
- 8 McCarthy, citing the last British estimates for the country’s urban population in 1944, puts the Arab total at 408,000. *Population*, p. 163.
- 9 On Jaffa, see Mustafa Murad Dabbagh, *Biladuna filastin* [Palestine, Our Country], vol. IV, part 2, *Fil diyar al-yafsiyya* [The Jaffa Region] (Beirut, 1972). On Haifa see Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864–1914: A Muslim Town in Transition* (Leiden, 1998), and May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Society, 1918–1939* (London, 1995).
- 10 About 199,000 Arabs lived in these cities and towns in 1944, the vast

majority of whom were forced to flee their homes in 1948. McCarthy, *Population*, p. 163.

- 11 See Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington DC, 1992), which enumerates 418 such villages.
- 12 Of the 26 million dunams of land in Palestine, about 1.5 million were Jewish owned in 1948. When the fighting ended, they controlled over 20 million. See Hind Amin al-Budayri, *Ard filastin: bayna maza'im al-sihyuniyya wa haqa'iq al-tarikh* [The Land of Palestine: Between the Claims of Zionism and the Facts of History] (Cairo, 1998), Table 23, p. 274.
- 13 It was Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion himself who thereafter gave canonical form to these allegations in a 1961 speech, as is pointed out by Ilan Pappé in *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951* (London, 1994), pp. 88-89.
- 14 Benny Morris, *The Birth*, Tom Segev, 1949, Simha Flapan, *The Birth Of Israel*, and Avi Shlaim, *Collusion*, all contributed significantly to this process, as did Ilan Pappé, in *The Making*, and others, including Michael Palumbo, *The Palestinian Catastrophe* (London, 1987).
- 15 In some cases these more recent authors reprised and amplified the analysis of earlier writers such as Walid Khalidi and Erskine Childers in their responses decades ago to the received Israeli version of what happened in 1948. These first refutations of the Israeli version of events include: Walid Khalidi, "Plan *Dalet*: The Zionist Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," *Middle East Forum* 37 (November 1961) 22-28; "The Fall of Haifa," *Middle East Forum* 35 (December 1959) 22-32; "Why Did the Palestinians Leave?" *Middle East Forum* 34 (July 1959) 21-24, 35; Erskine Childers, "The Other Exodus," *The Spectator*, no. 6933 (12 May 1961) 672-75, and "The Wordless Wish: From Citizens to Refugees," in Ibrahim Abu Lughod, ed., *The Transformation of Palestine* (Evanston IL, 1971), pp. 165-202. Khalidi's seminal "Plan *Dalet*" article, together with the 1961 correspondence about it and Childers' work, and a number of appendices, were reproduced in *The Journal of Palestine Studies* 18 (Autumn 1988) 4-70.
- 16 See, for example, Morris, *The Birth*, pp. 128-31.
- 17 Among the more popular and influential accounts of these events are A.W. Kayyali, *Palestine: A Modern History* (London, 1978), which was published in Arabic in numerous editions, and Naji 'Allush, *al-Muqawama al-'arabiyya fi filastin* [The Arab Resistance in Palestine] (Beirut, 1968). See also Ghassan Kanafani, *Thawrat 1936-39 fi filastin: khalfiyyat wa tafasil wa tahlil* [The Revolt of 1936-39 in Palestine: Background, Details and Analysis] (Beirut, 1974).
- 18 Walid Khalidi has published a definitive account of the Dayr Yasin massacre: *Dayr Yasin: al-Yum'a, 9/4/1948* [Dayr Yasin: Friday, 9/4/1948] (Beirut, 1998). Khalidi bases his description on the testimony of dozens of survivors, as well as on contemporary and more recently published accounts of these events.
- 19 See, for example, Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, pp. 1-62.
- 20 See, for example, Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (London, 1949), pp. 573-89.

- 21 Haim Levenberg, *The Military Preparations of the Arab Community of Palestine, 1945–1948* (London, 1993).
- 22 These include Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*; Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York, 1988); and Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York, 1997).
- 23 For an approach which compares Palestinian society during the Mandate to other Middle Eastern societies at comparable stages of development, see R. Khalidi, ‘Arab Society in Mandatory Palestine: The Half-Full Glass?’ paper presented to conference on “New Approaches to the Study of Ottoman and Arab Societies, 18th-mid-20th Centuries,” Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, May 1999.
- 24 The text of the Mandate can be found in J.C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, vol. II (New Haven CT, 1979), pp. 305–9.
- 25 Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917–1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement* (Ithaca NY, 1979), pp. 186–87.
- 26 The degree of this support in the economic sphere alone during the first decade of the Mandate can be gauged from Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separation in Palestine: British Economic Policy, 1920–1929* (Syracuse NY, 1995).
- 27 Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, p. 236.
- 28 Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in W. Polk and R. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago IL, 1968), pp. 41–68.
- 29 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).
- 30 This point is made for Haifa by Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period*.
- 31 For details of how this system worked in Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period, see R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 65–69.
- 32 Public *awqaf* revenues are dedicated to charitable and other public service purposes; see Yitzhak Reiter, *Islamic Endowments in Jerusalem under British Mandate* (London, 1996).
- 33 Great Britain. *Parliamentary Command Papers*, Cmd. 5479. “Palestine Royal Commission Report” (the “Peel report”) (London, 1937), paras. 80–82.
- 34 The best treatment of the *mufti* is in Mattar, *Mufti of Jerusalem*.
- 35 For more details on these secret British subsidies, cf. Weldon Matthews, “The Arab Istiqlal Party in Palestine, 1927–1934” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998). For more on the increase in British subsidies to the Supreme Muslim Council in the early 1930s, see Reiter, *Islamic Endowments*, pp. 30–33.
- 36 Zachary Lockman’s *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948* (Berkeley CA, 1996) has illuminating material on Reuven Shiloah, the founder of the Mossad, who in addition to organizing spy networks in the Arab countries in the 1930s was also a labor organizer among Palestinian Arabs.
- 37 A biography of Raghīb al-Nashashibi, by the journalist Nasser Eddin Nashashibi, *Jerusalem’s Other Voice: Ragheb Nashashibi and Moderation in*

Palestinian Politics, 1920–1948 (Exeter, 1990), must be used with care, but includes much primary material.

- 38 The rural operations of some of these merchants and money-lenders in the late nineteenth century are outlined in Bishara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: The Merchants and Peasants of Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley CA, 1995).
- 39 While Palestine took in 232,524 Jewish immigrants between 1932 and 1943, the United States, with its the wide-open spaces, was only willing to accept 170,883 during the same period: W. Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Appendix VI, Table C, p. 855.
- 40 For details, see Matthews, “The Arab Istiqlal Party.”
- 41 The best short study of Qassam is S. Abdullah Schleifer, “The Life and Thought of ‘Izz-id-Din al-Qassam,” *The Islamic Quarterly* 22 (1979) 61–81. See also his “‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam: Preacher and *Mujahid*,” in E. Burke III, ed., *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley CA, 1993), pp. 164–78. There is a huge literature on Qassam in Arabic, which attests to the importance that he came to have after his death to a broad range of political and intellectual trends, most recently the Islamists.
- 42 While many Palestinians revered him, then and later, and his memory was used for their purposes by many others, Qassam’s memory was reviled by his contemporary opponents, in a manner which has left a strong trace in official British- and Zionist-influenced historiography. Thus John Marlowe’s *Rebellion in Palestine* (London, 1946), which reflects a pro-Zionist British view, describes his actions (p. 145) as “the exploits of a brigand.” Marcel Roubicek writes in a similar vein in *Echo of the Bugle: Extinct Military and Constabulary Forces in Palestine and Transjordan, 1915–1967* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 53.
- 43 See the diaries of the young nationalist Akram Zu‘aytir for a contemporary reaction to the funeral: *Al-Haraka al-wataniyya al-filistiniyya 1935–1939: yawmiyyat Akram Zu‘aytir* [The Palestinian National Movement 1935–1939: The diaries of Akram Zu‘aytir] (Beirut, 1980), pp. 27 ff. The Arabic press of the months which followed is replete with echoes of Qassam’s death.
- 44 Between 1939 and 1946, Jewish land purchases amounted to about 145,000 dunams, nearly 10 percent of the total amount of land purchased in Palestine by the Zionist movement before 1948: W. Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Appendix I, pp. 842–43.
- 45 *Ibid.*, Appendix IV, pp. 846–49.
- 46 This calculation is based on the figures in W. Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Table A4–5, p. 104, which indicates that less than 40 percent of the male Muslim population (and a slightly larger proportion of the male Christian population) was between the ages of 20 and 60 in 1940.
- 47 This is clear from the figures in W. Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Appendix III, p. 845, which indicate that the British confiscated over 13,200 firearms from Arabs from 1936 until 1945. During the same period, confiscations from Jews totaled 521 weapons.
- 48 Robert Nathan, Oscar Gass, and Daniel Creamer, *Palestine: Problem and Promise, An Economic Study* (Washington DC, 1946), Table 1, p. 148. On the Jewish economy in Palestine cf. Smith, *Roots of Separation*.

- 49 Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, pp. 74–77.
- 50 Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, provides the most accurate perspective on how these intra-elite conflicts continued in the years after the crushing of the revolt.
- 51 In his unpublished autobiography, the newspaper publisher 'Isa al-'Isa details the results of his conflict with the *mufti*, which led to the burning of his house and his flight to Beirut in 1937. See 'Isa al-'Isa, "*Min dhikrayat al-madi*" [Memories of the past] (unpublished manuscript). See also Noha Tadros, "*Min dhikrayat al-Madi*, Souvenirs: autobiographie et representation de soi. 'Issa al 'Issa (journaliste palestinien 1878–1950)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris, 1999). A similar story about his father, Shaykh Muhi al-Din 'Abd al-Shafi, who was a member of the Supreme Muslim Shari'a Council, was related by Dr. Haydar Abd al-Shafi in an interview: Gaza, 9 August 1999.
- 52 The *mufti*'s wartime connections with the Nazis were grist for the propaganda mills of the Zionist movement, which laid the basis for a long-lasting portrayal of Palestinian nationalism as intrinsically anti-Semitic. See e.g., Joseph Schectman, *The Mufti and the Fuhrer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini* (New York, 1965).
- 53 See Levenberg, *Military Preparations*, for a generally accurate but somewhat confused account of the background to the Palestinian defeats of 1947–48.
- 54 See Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, for more details of how these areas were acquired.
- 55 Nathan, Gass and Creamer, in *Palestine: Problem and Promise*, table, p. 148, show that the Jewish share of national income in 1936 was already larger than that of the Arabs (£P18m vs. £P16m). The disparity was even greater by 1948.
- 56 The economy of the Yishuv was not simply larger and more dynamic: it could command far greater financial resources than could that of the Palestinian Arabs. According to Zeev Sternhell, during the 1920s "the annual inflow of Jewish capital was on average 41.5 percent larger than the Jewish net domestic product (NDP) . . . its ratio to NDP did not fall below 33 percent in any of the pre-World War II years and was kept at about 15 percent in all but one year since 1941." *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton NJ, 1998), p. 217.
- 57 The word which perhaps best sums up this sense in which failure has been surmounted and survived, which in itself is a sort of victory, is *sumud*, commonly translated as "steadfastness," but encompassing all the meanings just suggested. The word was ubiquitous in Palestinian narratives both of the various stages of the fighting in Lebanon from the late 1960s until 1982, and of resistance to the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1967 until the *intifada* began in 1987. For more details, see R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, pp. 177–209.